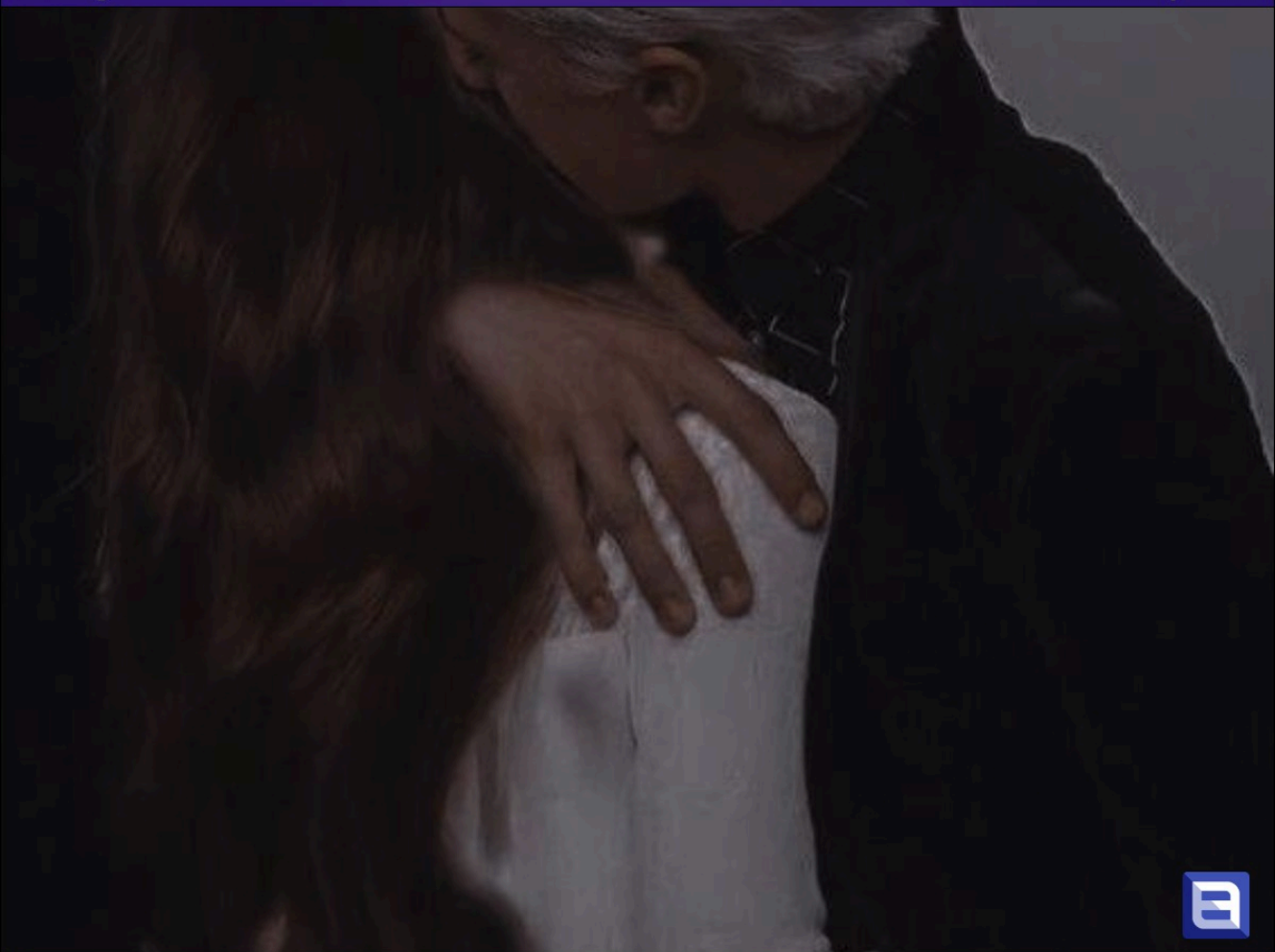


Best Enemies

camnz

Harry Potter

Complete



Best Enemies

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Summary

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A throw-away conversation with the vilest ferret on the planet has unintended consequences for Hermione's entire summer.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

The Death Eater trials were a messy and complicated affair. Money definitely helped to grease the wheels and it had ensured that the Malfoys got their trials first. Narcissa Malfoy had already had hers and had been completely acquitted thanks to Harry's testimony on her behalf.

Draco was having his trial next and Harry was going to testify for him as well. Although Harry had been more suspicious of Draco Malfoy activities than anyone, he felt fine about testifying on his behalf. Hermione was not so forgiving and her skin was practically crawling with indignity as she was sitting a seat over from Draco Malfoy in the waiting room of the Wizengamot court.

She was annoyed that they were in the same room. He was technically a prisoner and there was a guard across the room making sure he didn't abscond. Sadly, there was a chance that he would be acquitted, particularly with Harry standing up for him. If it was up to her, he'd rot.

"So, what you planning for the summer, Granger?" She heard his lazy drawl.

She couldn't quite understand why he was talking to her. Wasn't it below him to talk to her. She would really miss those days if they had passed. The constant tapping of his foot on the floor indicated how nervous he was. He was dressed in fine clothes, obviously the treatment of prisoners had improved from some of the others she's seen. Again a privilege of the wealthy.

"I am going backpacking around South America with my cousin." She said tersely.

"You're what?" He asked.

"Backpacking. Its a muggle concept related to travelling around the world on the cheap."

"Broke are we?" He asked with an arrogant chuckle.

Hermione's back bristled at the arrogance.

"No." She started as if speaking to an unruly three year old. "It has its own dignity."

"Yeah right." Draco snorted. "Travelling around staying in cheap dirt holes, not to mention travelling like a muggle. Awesome." He said sarcastically.

"Just shut up Malfoy. You couldn't hack it. Too dependent on people waiting on you hand and foot. You couldn't manage a day."

Hermione dismissed the challenging look he was giving her.

"Anyway, you're probably going to be rotting away in Azkaban." She concluded sharply.

"I can handle anything. Where do you think I have been spending the last three weeks?" He challenged.

“Where you naturally belong.”

“Believe me I can handle whatever flee infested hell hole you see fit to shack up in. I was on the run for several months remember.” He sniped.

“With your mummy!” She bit back.

“Right.” He said matter of factly. “When they let me go, I will join you on your tour of muggle establishments for the financially challenged. After all, it would be interesting to see how poor people like yourself make the best of your pathetic situation.”

“As if. You wouldn’t make it through the first day. Really Malfoy, you should just accept your pampered and gilded limits.” She laughed derisively. “I would really like to see you try. I bet you’d be crying for your mummy before you pack it in.”

He snorted again and mumbled something under his breath. He was too smart to call her a filthy mudblood just before his Death Eater trial, but she was sure it was something equally colourful. She’d never understand why Harry would even contemplate helping him. Unfortunately we would probably receive a light sentence and if by star crossed chance he made it out in time for her departure, there was no chance he’d follow through. He wasn’t exactly known for follow-through.

She stood and walked over to one of the windows when Harry walked through the door. Even looking at him pale ferret face made her want to smash his face in.

Harry arrived just in time for the courtroom door to open and invite all parties in. Draco, to Hermione’s delight, looked like he was about to throw up with nerves.

Serves the prick right, she thought.

She stayed until she was asked to testify, which was only to corroborate some of the facts from Harry’s testimony. Sadly they didn’t ask what kind of loser arsehole they were dealing with, because she could have enlightened them. After that she left, no point hanging around. She had seen her fill of Draco Malfoy looking nervous and stressed. Not that it hadn’t been enjoyable, but it required looking at him which was taxing no matter how unhappy he looked.

The wizard world was a mess in the aftermath of the Great Battle. She, along with Harry and Ron were the celebrities de jour and it wasn’t sitting well with any of them. She couldn’t wait to escape with her cousin Clara, who she didn’t really get on with that well, but Clara knew how to sniff out a party at a thousand paces, so her parents felt it would be good for her to loosen up a bit after the year she had barely survived. She couldn’t quite argue with the point that some light diversion might be in order and it might give her a chance to get to know her cousin better.

The press and the people with political aspirations clambering after them were distasteful. Harry was struggling but trying his best, Ron kind of loved the attention, particularly from the female side to Lavender Brown’s chagrin. Ron and Hermione didn’t quite get back together after their time on the run and he had returned to Lavender Brown’s willing arms. Hermione couldn’t quite forgive him for abandoning them in the thick of it.

As for the rest, they were starting to leave her alone a bit more after some of the terse comments she had given to the press and at functions. Harry was still optimistic about a better world, but she was starting to get creepy feelings about how some things were developing.

The fact that the toad-woman Dolores Umbridge had been appointed as an undersecretary to the Department of Muggle Affairs was incomprehensible. Even worse was the new sub department committed to Muggleborn Affairs, which just sent the creepies up Hermione's back, even though she could understand that the Ministry intended to make an extra effort to integrate Muggleborns into wizard society as most who hadn't been killed, had left the wizard society after they had been 'shown the door' and their wands had been seized. It just like the Muggleborn registration requirement during the war with a prettier PR purpose.

Harry was still optimistic and was being wooed by everyone. Arthur Weasley had been promoted, which was good, but Hermione wasn't sure much of the supposed reforms were being implemented. As for her, she was going back to Hogwarts in the fall to finish her last year. There were some limits of what she could pursue in terms of careers without her last year, so better off getting it. Harry was going to try to get into the Auror's Department and he can pretty much do whatever he wanted in this society now. Ron didn't seem to have made up his mind, but his mother was pretty adamant that he return with Ginny this fall. Mrs. Weasley usually gets what she wants from Ron, so Hermione expects that he will be there, along with his attached-to-the-hip girlfriend Lavender.

Hermione caught up with Harry at his new apartment right in the centre of Diagon Alley. It had been a gift as a thank you for everything he had done for this world since he was a toddler.

"He's been acquitted." Harry said with a tired smile.

"Shame. It would have warmed the cockles of my heart thinking of him rotting away in Azkaban." Hermione said with a wave of her Butter beer glass.

"He is an utter git, but he doesn't deserve Azkaban. Everything he did, he did under duress." Harry said.

Hermione had to grudgingly concede the point.

"He also said he had plans to do a bit of travel around the muggle world over the summer. Completely odd for him, but it went over well with the crowd." Harry continued.

Hermione's eyes sprang open. She had completely forgotten about their little challenge. Oh god, she thought, hoping he's not serious about coming along. I would rather kill myself then go backpacking with Malfoy.

"Isn't that the oddest thing you'd ever heard?" Harry continued while cutting up some vegetables for the dinner he was cooking for them and Ginny who was still expected. "I never would have guessed that one."

Hermione struggled to think of something to say, but in the end decided to not say anything at all. There was no way he would actually go through with it. And she certainly wasn't going to extend the invite or tell him when they were leaving. He would just end up missing her and no one would be the wiser.

The next couple of days went in a blur as she and Clara was trying to get ready. They had the first leg of their flight booked which took them to Mexico for a change before heading over to Cuba. Hermione had always wanted to go so it was their first stop before flying onto

Brazil. The plan was then to go by bus through Argentina, Chile and end up in Peru before heading back at the end of the summer.

Hermione could feel some excitement starting to seep into her after her complete exhaustion following the war. The casualties had been heartbreaking and had sapped her of every good feeling she had managed to hang onto.

She had a credit card, her passport and visas organised. She was packed and ready to go. The whole affair had been planned with military precision. The hostels had been booked on the internet and she had read up on all the things she was planning to do along the way. Clara might be hungover through the vast bulk of it, but she didn't care. Fun would be had if it killed her.

The night before their departure, her parents were probably more nervous than she was. Harry and Ginny had come by to say farewell. Mrs. Weasley would not let Ginny stay over at Harry's but for most intents and purposes, with the exception of apparating home to sleep, Ginny was pretty much living with Harry.

Hermione had a fitful sleep before getting up at dawn and started to cook breakfast for all. With everything packed, there wasn't much else for her to do. Clara was staying over and they were heading off around nine.

Once she'd eaten she had to help Clara repack as she couldn't find her passport which was in her bag somewhere. Hermione decided that maybe she would hang onto all important documents during the trip.

She could feel excitement building as they headed toward the door, packed up like cart horses. Well, not so bad. Hermione's planning had reduced a lot of the bulk and she had managed to get Clara to leave behind about half of her intended wardrobe.

As she opened the door she was met with the sight she least wanted to see, Draco Malfoy.

"Going somewhere Granger?" He said to Hermione's gaping mouth.

"You can't be serious." She said.

"Dead serious. It seems it would do my father's case a world of good if his one and only son travelled around the muggle world with a mudblood and a muggle this summer." He said with a tight smile that showed he wasn't all that pleased either.

"How did you know where I live?" She stammered. "How did you know we were going?"

"Suffice to say I know where you live." He said with a sneer. "And I had an elf posted to tell me when you were going."

"You'd had an elf posted, watching my house?" She said incredulously.

"Twenty-four, seven." He said lightly.

"That's barbaric."

"This shall be fun, don't you think?" He said with narrowed eyes.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

"You're bringing your boyfriend?" Clara yelled incredulously.

"He is NOT my boyfriend." Hermione defended herself. "And he's not coming."

"Yes I am. You invited me remember, so I am coming like it or not." Draco interfered.

"Calm down everyone." Hermione's father said and stepped between them in the tight entrance to the house. "I am sure this can all be worked out."

Hermione was huffing with annoyance.

"We don't really have time to argue now. Can we complete this conversation in the car?"

"Yeah Granger, get in the car." Draco said.

"Do you even know what a car is?" She snapped back.

They were all motioned towards the reliable station wagon her parents had depended on since she was small.

"Travelling light, I see." Mr. Granger said when he noted that Draco didn't have a backpack to put in the boot.

"I would have brought someone too if I knew that was the way we were going." Clara whined. "Now I get stuck being the third wheel, just fantastic."

"No, he's the third wheel and he's not staying." Hermione said.

"Don't worry Granger, I won't get between you and your girlfriend. Didn't know you cut that way, but it explains a lot." Draco said.

"Just fuck off Malfoy." Hermione snapped.

"Hermione! Language please." Her mum pleaded.

"Right, off we are." Mr. Granger said through gritted teeth. "Traffic will be murder if we don't get off before rush hour."

It was a tense but quiet ride to Heathrow.

"Do you even have a ticket?" Hermione questioned sharply.

"No, but I understand you can buy them. It is normally common practice as I understand." Draco replied.

"If there is any space left." Hermione said with hope as she rubbed her aching head.

"We will ask at the sales counter." Her father said matter of factly.

"I'm sorry." Hermione's mother said. 'I am Alice Granger and this is David.' She said pointing to her husband. "We are Hermione's parents."

"Draco Malfoy." He said with a nod from the back seat.

Hermione's mum cast her a glance before turning forward, "Its lovely to meet you."

The airport was a maelstrom of activity, with Mr. Granger trying to organise the orderly navigation through the departure area.

Hermione and Clara went to check in while Mr. Granger took Draco to the sales desk.

"There was plenty of space as it turned out." Hermione's father said as they all rejoined. "If you are amenable to travel business class."

"It cost £950." Draco said to Hermione. "I thought this was supposed to be cheap travel."

"Obviously not for the likes of you." Hermione said. "Maybe you should have taken that as a hint and gone home."

"You know I can't do that." He hissed under his breath.

Hermione rolled her eyes and stepped away from the source of all her annoyance.

"Are you sure about this?" Hermione's mum asked her. "Isn't that the boy that was so awful to you in school?"

"It sure is." Hermione said with a fake smile. "Don't worry, he won't last the week."

"You don't have to go, if you don't want to."

"Don't worry mum, I'll be fine. Seriously, he won't last the week after he sees the hostel in Havana."

After her parents gave her and Clara huge bear hugs and an awkward handshake with Draco, they said goodbye. Hermione could tell that her mum was holding back the tears, so she decided it was time to go before it got out of hand.

"Why are we standing in this queue?" Draco asked annoyed.

"Its passport control, you idiot." She snapped.

"Don't call me an idiot, mudblood."

Hermione bristled at the term.

"You do have a passport, don't you?" She challenged. "You can't travel without one."

Draco grabbed her passport and looked it over before pulling out his wallet and transforming it into a passport, complete with picture and details. Hermione couldn't help but be impressed because it was a very difficult and detailed piece of transfiguration, maybe even beyond her capabilities on the first attempt, not that she would ever admit that.

Hermione watched as Draco's passport went through passport control without any issues. Clara immediately hit the duty free shops, leaving Hermione and Draco to deal with each other.

"I need a coffee." He said and headed towards one of the coffee bars, dragging her with her. "I am not letting you out of my sight so you can dump me here."

He ordered a coffee from the girl behind the counters.

"You won't be sitting with us on the plane." Hermione said.

"Yes, I realise that, I am travelling in a better class than you." He responded. "As it should be."

"You're an utter turd." She said.

"Such language, what would your mother say?" He said feigning shock.

After a further half hour of Draco silently following her through the shops, they found Clara and made their way to the departure gate.

Draco stayed with Hermione even though the airline staff were calling for all business class travellers to board. She wasn't sure whether that was because he was uncertain about what to do or if he wanted to make sure she didn't run away while he got on the plane. Because the thought had occurred to her.

In the end, they parted when the stewardess pointed him in another direction. Hermione felt the relief of his absence as if a dark cloud had let up.

God, I hate him, she thought. He is going to ruin a trip of a life time, she continued. But it will be ok, he won't be able to last. One week and then he can say he travelled around with a muggle and a mudblood to the Wizengamot before they send his father to get his soul sucked out. By the time they reach Copacabana Beach, he will be a distant and unpleasant memory.

At least she didn't have to sit by him for the next ten hours, she thought blissfully. Clara settled down to sleep as soon as they were in the air. Hermione had her book on advanced Runes, but decided to distract her mind for a minute by flipping through Clara's Cosmo magazine first.

"Am I supposed to sit here to ten hours?" She heard a voice that sent creepies up her spine.

"Yes, Draco. Now got back to your seat, sit down and shut up."

"This is utterly barbaric."

"Yes well, you decided to tag along for it, so now you need to suffer through it." She said without being able to completely hide her joy at his discomfort.

He snorted and looked around like everything smelled bad to him.

"You agreed to travel like a muggle," She continued, "so now just put up and shut up."

He ripped the Cosmo mag out of her hands and surveyed the cover.

"How to have better orgasms." He asked with a pointed look. "What's the matter Granger, the Weasel not doing it for you?"

"Fuck off Malfoy." She hissed desperately trying to keep the blush from travelling up her neck.

He snorted again and smirked, "Touched a nerve have I? At least I'm not the one who needs help getting off."

Hermione crunched up her hands until her knuckles were turning white from the strain.

"Well they're not exactly lining up around the corner for you are they?" She snapped back. "In fact, I would call it utterly desperate that you have to follow me around to find something to do with yourself these days."

"Watch your mouth Granger." He said before he huffed and strode off, knocking a woman into her seat as he passed.

You are a total effin cock, she thought after him. It was true that his stock had sunk somewhat, but they weren't exactly lining up for her either, with the exception of the salacious older wizards who kept on pinching her backside at the functions she was forced to attend.

To her utter bliss, she didn't hear from Draco again during the flight, but he was waiting for them right outside the door the plane once they'd landed in Havana.

"Its fucking hot here." He said.

"Don't like it, go home." She replied.

Once through, they changed some money and exited the airport. Hermione and Clara were looking for the bus that would take them into the town.

"Why don't we take a car like everyone else." Draco whined.

"Because we're backpacking." Hermione snapped back. "Travelling on the cheap remember."

"It hasn't been all that cheap so far. It cost me £950 pounds to get here and I only brought £1,000 with me."

Hermione stared at him for a while, "How are you going to survive on £50?"

"You said it would be cheap." He yelled. "I will just have to go to a wizard bank and transfer some galleons. Money is not an issue."

"It is when there's no wizarding bank. This is Cuba, you idiot. There are no wizards here, they all left with during the revolution."

"I said don't call me an idiot you frigid mudblood."

Hermione just gritted her teeth and boarded the bus to the city.

Draco's mood got even worse when they had to take another bus in the city which was crowded and smelled like old sweat and mothballs.

Things didn't improve when they got to the hostel, which was a less than delightful concrete structure painted with bad murals in an attempt to cheer it up.

"Even Azkaban was nicer than this dump." Draco said.

Clara was much more interested in the boys than the decor and she wasn't complaining.

When Draco saw their room, he just stared at Hermione. It was a six bed room with three double bunker beds lining each wall.

“I am not sleeping with muggles.” He hissed in her ear.

“I’m afraid you are.” She said trying to suppress her giggle. “What’s the matter, too much for you. Ahww. What a shame, I guess you should go home.”

“And I don’t sleep with girls unless I’m fucking them.”

“Oh gee, what are you going to do then?” She asked with a fake overly concerned look.

“Fuck you Granger.” He said and threw his meagre belongings on one of the lower bunks.

“A complete impossibility. So don’t even think about it.” She said with a sharp tilt of her head to accentuate her point. Clara had taken the upper bunk on the other wall, which only left the upper bunk above Draco free.

The other beds had things on them and they soon found out who their room mates were when three Australian boys walked in the room to Clara’s complete delight. They were buff and tanned, with sun bleached hair and bright teeth for miles. And they called Draco ‘mate’, which made Hermione giggle as he shot her a look that would freeze many where they stood.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Hermione could barely contain her excitement the next morning, even though there was grumpiness all around her. Malfoy was just Malfoy and Clara was upset at being dragged out of bed before noon. Hermione didn't care, she was in Cuba, away from home, away from school, although a small part of it has followed her.

She had her khaki cargo pants, a white tank top and sturdy shoes. Clara wore her jeans shorts and a bright top. Draco was dressed in his typical black suit.

Hermione smiled to herself when she realised that he would likely cook in that suit and hopefully get sun burnt as well. It didn't seem like he brought anything else with him.

They spent the day exploring the old parts of Havana. The derelict buildings that had seen their heyday in the 1920s. Hermione felt like she was walking through a living museum. She saw the old cars that she'd seen in travel documentaries. Clara discovered the ice-cream wasn't half bad.

Draco walked behind them looking murderous, although Hermione suspected it was a look that he reserved specifically for her. He actually took an ice-cream that Clara offered him.

"Does he have to come with us?" Clara whined. "It's like we're being followed around by an undertaker."

"He'll get fed up." Hermione said without looking up from her Lonely Planet book.

"Couldn't he at least wear something else? Something a bit more normal." Clara continued.

"He doesn't do normal."

"Oh look, Espadrilles." Clara said and was gone.

"Still can't get your nose out of a book." Came the dry drawl that Hermione hated the most. "Why even bother going anywhere when you could have just spent the summer in the library."

Hermione lifted the book away from her face and looked him over.

"I still vote for the days when you were too good to talk to me." Hermione said with an exasperated sigh.

"Oh believe me, nothing has changed. If it wasn't for my father's case, I would have a million better things to do. But as it is, I must suffer through your inconsequential dribble."

"Hmm." Was all Hermione could say before turning away. He actually wasn't bothering her so much, or maybe it was just the flush building up on his cheeks that made her so tolerant. He must be getting pretty uncomfortable in that suit. Seeing him give up and leave might just be the sweetest sight.

"I'm going to the beach." Clara stated with the certainty that told she would consider no other options.

"Fine." Hermione said. She had anticipated that bit of beach languishing would be required, it would give her a chance to read through the guide book. After all, she wouldn't be the idiot sitting on a hot beach in a black suit. She couldn't keep the smile from her face.

Draco managed to find a shady spot in a bar and ordered himself a beer. Clara stripped off the instance she hit the sand and lay down to sun bath. It took a whole four minutes before stripping was necessary, another four and a dip was practically required.

Hermione stood in the cool water enjoying the sights and sounds. It wasn't Copacabana beach, but as a warm up, it was the Caribbean and it was awesome. She was still amazed she was here. Clara had found some boys to flirt with and Draco was a little black speck sitting in a bar. She wondered what they could do next, something that would really piss him off. Maybe they should go out with the Australian boys tonight. She figured Clara had plans in that direction anyway.

And it turned out that she wasn't wrong.

"I am not going to eat dinner with those morons." Draco spat.

"Then stay here. Find your own dinner. Whatever, I don't care." Hermione snapped back.

"It is completely intolerable that I have to sleep in the same room with other people." He continued.

"Why, you've done it since you were eleven."

"Yes, but they're magical."

Hermione raised an eyebrow.

"How can that possibly make a difference?"

"It always makes a difference."

"Then go home." She stated.

"No." He stated back.

Hermione just shook her head and left him. She'd had enough. Spending the day with him was intolerable and now she needed a break. Spending the evening with increasingly inebriated and touchy boys was her idea of fun. It wasn't how she wanted her holiday to go. But it was however, exactly how Clara wanted her holiday to go.

Hermione decided to walk back to the hostel on her own. Things didn't look quite so exciting and welcoming at night when walking home alone, but she had her wand if something happened.

Try as she might, she just couldn't shake the feeling that she was trying to hold onto a fantasy in regards to this perfect trip she was hoping for. She had some serious worries that this would turn into the trip from hell. Anyone could have told her that the second Malfoy decided to invite himself along.

She spotted him right away as she walked into the hostel. He was drinking and smoking a cigar at the bar.

“Ugh.” Was all she could manage.

“What’s the matter, mudblood? What’s got your knickers in a twist? Or more accurately did the ‘Aussies’ fail to untwist your knickers?”

“Just eff off Malfoy.” She snapped and got another infuriating sneer back.

Hermione went up to the room and went to bed. She managed to just get to sleep when the Australian boys and Clara returned. They were all drunk and trying to whisper, which was actually louder than talking normally. Then someone would stumble and they all broke out into a chorus of laughing.

Once they were all in bed and snoring, Malfoy entered.

“Oh lovely.” He said sarcastically. “I’ve never slept in a sty but this would be just how I’d image it.”

“Then go home Malfoy.”

“In your dreams Granger.”

Malfoy had learned the next day, he left the jacket at the hostel and stuck to his white shirt. Hermione dragged them to one of the Revolution museums. Clara wasn’t interested and made that known each and every second. Malfoy was just there, being his typical ray of sunshine. Hermione was starting to think of way to get rid of both of them.

Not that it was necessary because later that evening, Clara declared that she was going to Thailand with the Australian boys. Hermione was so shocked she didn’t know what to say and nothing she said would change Clara’s mind.

The next afternoon she had traded in her tickets around South America for a ticket to Thailand.

“I’m eighteen, Hermione, I can do whatever I want.”

“You just don’t dump someone on the other side of the world!” Hermione yelled at her.

“You’ve got him.” Clara said and pointed at Malfoy. “You two can visit cemeteries or something else incredibly boring. I’m sorry but I’m not going to spend my trip walking around old piles of rocks.”

Nothing would change her mind and Hermione could only watch as Clara packed and got into a van with the Australians. She gave Hermione a hug and a kiss on the cheek as she said goodbye like they had just met up while shopping.

“Unfucking believable.” Hermione said.

“Not even your family can stand you.” Malfoy said. “Interesting.”

“Fuck off Malfoy.” She said again like she had pretty much every time she’d seen him.

She wasn’t go to spend the evening with him so she snuck out the other entrance and spent the rest of the day in Havana on her own. It was perfect. It was just dusk and the retreating

sun painted the whole city in golden colours.

She ate at a cheap restaurant and the food was dreadful, but she didn't care. After she walked around the city for a while; it seemed to be teeming with life after dark. She wished Harry and Ginny were here. She would have so much fun with them, exploring some of the local establishments.

When she got back to the hostel she was met with a furious Malfoy.

"I'm starving." He stated.

"For God's sake, Malfoy, you actually an adult now, you need to learn to feed yourself."

"Dutch people have moved into our room and they have rearranged our sleeping situation. Who does that, decides to move your bed?"

"Dutch people obviously."

"And people do that in the muggle world, just decide to change things without asking?"

"No, its pretty rude, even in the muggle world." Hermione sighed.

"Why are we staying in this dump?"

"Because that's what this kind of travel is all about." Hermione said stubbornly.

"There are tons of nice hotels."

"We can't afford them."

"I'm fucking loaded Granger."

"Yeah, you and your what, ten pounds? There is no wizard bank here Malfoy."

"I can pay you back." He said with an exasperated look.

Two backpackers of some European variety walked in the door and pushed past them as they stood by the reception.

"Sorry kids, no room." The hostel man said. "But I do have a small one bed apartment that is really cheap."

"We'll take it." Draco said.

"What? No!" Hermione said.

"We'll take it." He repeated to the hostel man's shrug.

"I'm not..."

"I'll fucking put you over my shoulder and carry you Granger. I'm not staying in this dump sharing a room with muggles."

"And you don't think someone would object if you forced me out the door?" Hermione said with her arms crossed. "This trip was about staying in hostels."

"He said it was cheap, so you will still be slumming it as you're so damn keen on it."

“Now go pack or I swear I will carry you. This is a Latin country, Granger, they’re not going to object.”

“My wife is concerned for our finances.” He said to the hostel man and the staring backpackers.

“It is very cheap.” The man said.

“See, wifie. Cheap.” Malfoy said with a challenge in his eye and the infuriating sneer.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Hermione couldn't believe Draco had turned her carefully crafted plan around. Well, Clara had done it first, but Clara's defection hadn't really changed much. Malfoy's interference hadn't been a huge thing, changing the accommodation but it still grated. Maybe because he was right. Sharing her sleeping quarters with multitudes of strangers wasn't as enjoyable as she'd hoped. Not that she would ever admit it.

He seemed perfectly serious about carrying her there if she made a fuss, and now that he had made everyone believe they were a couple, a married couple, it was unlikely that anyone would interfere. Being carried around by Malfoy would be beyond mortifyingly embarrassing. So she agreed, she packed her things and ran out through the rain and got in the cab that would take them to their new cheap apartment. It was only for a few days after all, until she got the air ticket to Brazil. The plan was to spend another week here before heading off to Rio.

The building was gray and crumbling. It was far from the best part of town. There was only one single naked bulb in the stair case leading up to the apartment. The key to the door wouldn't work so Malfoy had to resort to fixing it with his wand.

The apartment wasn't more than a room with a small extra corner keeping what looked like a gas stove. It did have a balcony that looked over a large, wet courtyard surrounded by houses. Hermione wasn't all that sure of its structural integrity, but the two large doors let the night breeze in.

The wall plaster was falling off the walls and there was a rotting floor board in one of the corners.

"Nasty enough for you?" Malfoy asked as he turned on the tap at the sink. It banged for a while before water poured out.

"Lovely." Hermione responded through gritted teeth. "There's only one bed!"

"Shame the Weasel wasn't here, he'd feel right at home."

"You'll have to sleep on the floor." She said with crossed arms.

"Like hell."

"Well, I'm not sleeping on the floor. This was your idea so you have to be accommodating."

"That is just not going to happen. If you have a problem sleeping in the bed, you can find somewhere else to sleep. The bathtub looks relatively clean. You can sleep in there."

"I am not sleeping in an iron tub." Hermione snapped. It would probably fall through the floor. The bed was the only thing in there that looked relatively decent. The white sheets looked crisp and clean. It was getting late and she was too tired to care much at this point.

“Fine, you can sleep under the blankets and I will sleep over the blankets. Believe me, you have absolutely nothing to worry about. I would rather cuddle up to one of Hagrid’s extra special friends that he won’t tell about that go anywhere near you.” He said and after a while Hermione nodded a grudging agreement. Malfoy was not gentlemanly enough to offer her the bed, so she might as well accept the compromise. They had already paid for a week and this was probably just as bad a spending a week with the new dorm mates at the hostel, two of which looked like they were about to get it on when they were packing up their stuff. Not to mention the two European backpackers that were waiting outside the door for them to clear out.

The rain made it incredibly humid. Hermione felt like her clothes were sticking to her, so she decided to claim a bit of space to herself and locked herself in the bathroom. The bathroom was run down and there were the odd tiles missing, but it was clean and the water was just the right temperature to cool her down a bit.

Malfoy was already asleep when she got out. It still felt odd getting into a bed next to him, but her exhaustion soon made her forget all about the less than ideal situation.

She woke up snuggled right into his back at the crack of dawn. The realisation made her jerk back.

“I know you always wanted me, but please try to refrain from molesting me, Granger.” She heard him say, dashing her hopes that he wouldn’t notice. But he always notices whenever she done something she didn’t want anyone to see. Nothing ever got past him to her utter chagrin.

“Ugh.” Was all she could manage, her skin literally felt like it was crawling. She wasn’t sure she could manage a week of this. Maybe she should just go home. “I think I’m going to be sick.”

“Well do it somewhere else. The last think I need is to smell your sick. That along with the smell of you it would probably just be enough to make me let go of my resolve not to kill mudbloods.”

“Your vile.”

“You smell vile.” He said and took his shirt off and proceeded to clean it with his wand. Hermione couldn’t stop herself from staring. She had never seen him so indisposed, but it didn’t seem to phase him that he was half naked in front of her. Hermione had to force herself to look away.

“I hate you.” She said.

“Seriously, I think I hate you more.”

“Then maybe its time for your little experiment to end. Isn’t it time you run home to mummy.” Hermione snapped.

“We are charming in the mornings aren’t we.” He said. “I’m fucking starving. Get up, I want to eat.”

“And what does that have to do with me?”

“Just get off your ass you stupid bint.”

“At least I can manage to feed myself. I’ll never know how you managed to survive the war. With manners like yours I’m surprised you own family didn’t top you off.”

“I’m hungry, Granger. I swear if I don’t get something to eat, I will chop you up and eat you.” He said with a growl. “Actually that just gave me some lovely images to hold onto for the day.”

They found a little cafe around the corner that served them omelettes and coffee. Malfoy really was hungry, because he’s focus was exclusively on his food. He didn’t say a word the entire time, which made for a more pleasant experience in Hermione’s view. She spent some time considering what she wanted to do that day. She really wanted to travel along the coast a bit. And to go to the Hemingway museum.

It still gave her a smile as she looked around. She still couldn’t believe she was here, she had spent so much time planning this trip and now it was finally happening. Not perhaps exactly according to plan, but she was here.

A sign across the road caught her eye. Mostly because it was in English although badly. It was for a scooter rental agency. Travelling around on a scooter would give so much more freedom to explore than taking the crowded bus around. She made up her mind that she would get one. She used to ride them around in Greece when she went on holiday with her parents, and it had been the best time.

Malfoy had no idea what she was talking about when she said she was going to rent one, but he didn’t argue. He just stayed in the cafe and watched her as she acquired a scooter. It turned out to be quite expensive so they would have to share one. Or even better, he could stay here and she would go on her own. Somehow she didn’t think her luck would be that good.

“Let’s go for a ride.” She said and hopped on. She patted the seat behind her and waited for him.

“You know,” Malfoy said slowly, “I don’t see any guys being driven around by girls.”

“So?” Hermione asked confused.

“So I’m not going to be the nancy being driven around by a chick. I’ll drive.”

“You can’t be serious.” She stated. “You don’t know how to drive. I do. I’ve done it since I was a kid.”

“How hard can it be? You can do it. Muggles can do it for Merlin’s sake.” He said arrogantly.

Hermione was stunned, but he made it clear he wouldn’t budge. So she let him try. It took him 15 minutes of jumping and stalling to figure it out, then he was ready.

“You’re going to get me killed.” Hermione said.

“I’m a seeker, I think I can handle some muggle contraption.” He said and thumped the seat behind him.

The required closeness of the tiny little seat had not been something Hermione had considered, but now, finding herself squeezed into his back for a second time that day, she

had some serious reconsideration of this idea. She didn't quite know where to put her hands, so she held onto the sides of his shirt. It turned out not to be enough as holding onto something more sturdy was completely required because he treated it like a broom. To Hermione's complete irk, his ability to handle the 'muggle contraption' turned out to be true. An hour in, he handled the little scooter like a pro.

"I like that muggle." Malfoy said after they exited the Hemingway museum.

Hermione could only roll her eyes. "I am glad you've finally found one you like. I think that might qualify as a momentous occasion."

"I might even read one of his books." Malfoy continued as he got on the scooter.

They went for a long ride up and down the coastline before returning to the little apartment late in the evening. They could hear Cuban music playing as they walked up the staircase. It was even louder in the apartment. The whole courtyard below their balcony was full of people and there was a Cuban band belting out their unique Caribbean rhythms.

"I guess we now know why it was so cheap." Hermione said. "It looks like they're just getting started."

The courtyard was full of Cuban pensioners who were dancing and drinking. Hermione couldn't help but laugh, it was the most surreal sight she had ever seen. Even though the music was shaking the disintegrating walls of the room. They didn't finish playing until two in the morning.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

They spent a couple of days exploring the island in virtual silence. Hermione had to confront the idea that he might not be packing up and going home just yet. Other than a quick negotiation of what they should do during the day, they rarely spoke to each other even though they basically had to live in each other's pockets.

Speaking of pockets, somehow Malfoy had ended up with all the money; her money, and she'd ended up having to ask him to get her stuff. It happened really without her realising it. She tried to correct the situation but he won't have it. His justification was that it was safer with him rather in her little backpack because anyone could open it when she had her back turned.

Other than tackling him to the ground or pulling out her wand, there was little to do if she didn't want to get in an actual fight with him. In the end she relented in utter exasperation, she couldn't imagine why it was so important to him. Maybe rich people were just lost without money in their pockets, she surmised.

With the exception of the money, it hadn't been too bad. They had some weird truce in regards the constant sniping, but it fell apart as soon as one of them opened their mouths.

They even managed to cook simple dinners on the gas stove in the apartment. Well she did. He probably couldn't manage to feed himself if his life depended on it. He could however choose some good wines and Hermione was starting to enjoy tasting the difference. Wine was relatively new to her, but it was growing on her. Malfoy seemed to know a lot more about wine than she did.

After a quick Neapolitan Spaghetti meal, she settled down to watch the proceedings in the courtyard. Malfoy had found some book on the revolution and was lying on the bed reading.

The band started and the music lifted her mood. It was just impossible to be in a bad mood with this music. She couldn't make out what they were singing, but it was obviously about love and passion. The pensioners were starting to hit the dance floor and Hermione stood on the balcony and watched. Once in a while, one of the old men would wave at her and say something she didn't understand, but the sentiment seemed to say, come down and dance.

She was tempted. She couldn't quite stop her feet from moving. The rhythm was so utterly commanding, seductive and soft. The idea of going down and dancing was a little foreign, but she had to admit that the thought had occurred to her. It must be the wine.

Some variety of red, she couldn't remember what Malfoy had called it, but she had a few glasses of it and it nicely warmed her belly and her blood.

"Are you going to stand there all night?" Malfoy asked and threw his book down on the floor. "Why don't you just go."

"I might." She said back. She didn't want to admit that she was a bit scared. Not that she knew what was so scary about dancing pensioners. Maybe that the expression of passion was so obvious. The dancing was so intimate, not lewd or anything like that, but just... a bit sincere in its appreciation of the difference between men and women. Who knew the life of pensioners was so colourful.

It was nothing like the mechanical ball room dancing they had done at Hogwarts. Hermione didn't quite know why, but it made her blush. Ron would never even dance with her, let alone anything approaching something sensual. He probably doesn't even understand what the word means.

"Do you want me to take you down?" Malfoy asked with annoyance.

Hermione bit her lip. She really wanted to go, but having Malfoy glowering at her the entire time wouldn't be fun at all.

"No its alright. I will go on my own." She said with more determination than she felt. She would be alright. It was ridiculous being afraid of a bunch of senior citizens. Alright, maybe not all of them were seniors, maybe the younger people were in their forties.

She put on her simple flat shoes and went downstairs. Chinese lanterns lit up the whole space in a warm light and it took a whole two seconds before a smiling pensioner was twirling her around. It was perhaps a little too close contact for comfort. Hermione became aware that they had different ideas of personal space here. But once she started to relax it was really fun.

She could see Malfoy on the balcony watching. The man she was dancing with asked her something but she couldn't understand. He gave up and they kept dancing. The man was really tanned like someone who spent all day in the sun. She was getting a bit of a tan herself.

The song ended and a new one started, along with a new dance partner. Another older man with a full head of graying hair. He was still an attractive man, was probably an absolute stunner in his day. He said something but Hermione could only shrug her shoulders to say she didn't understand.

The songs wore on and Hermione had a great time. The people were kind and the men, particularly enjoyed having a young woman in a white sun dress on the dance floor.

Someone was trying to say something to her, but she had to say that she couldn't understand.

"They think we're newlyweds." Malfoy said behind her. The man she was dancing with bowed out with the indication that she should dance with Malfoy.

"Well you told the Landlord we were married." She said while Malfoy drank from a glass.

"Is that whiskey?" She asked.

"Rum actually. This is Cuba." He said. "Do you want some?"

Hermione shook her head and Malfoy placed the glass down on a table.

"Best keep up appearances." He said and took her hand to pull her towards him.

Dancing with strangers was one thing, but being this close to Malfoy was just uncomfortable. She was much closer on the back of the scooter every day, but this was different. She couldn't quite explain the distinction but there was one. This was face to face, with him leading and her being submissive. His hand was warm and she could feel the heat from his body. Her eyes were level with his chin and lips. She could smell the rum on his breath. It reminded her of chocolates she would have at Christmas at her Grandmother's house.

Apparently the 'newlyweds' on the dance floor was a joy for some of the women to see, because it looked like some of them were melting. Hermione wanted to stop and remind them that this was Malfoy and he was revolting. Seriously, ladies, no need to look like that.

"Might as well make a show of it." He said and leaned in. Hermione didn't know what he was doing until his lips were on hers. A bolt of electricity shot through her and she had an instinct to jump away, but she didn't. Instead the kiss got deeper before it finished and he pulled away.

Hermione's ears were ringing and she was blushing brighter than a Christmas bauble. With that he picked up his glass and went upstairs. Hermione could only stand there and watch. She was stunned, he might as well have slapped her.

Now she didn't know what to do. The ladies were nodding their heads towards the stairs indicating for her to follow him, which she really didn't want to do this moment. But she didn't feel comfortable staying either. The ladies looked like they were just about to come chase her up those stairs.

Maybe she should try to explain that they weren't really newlyweds. Although on second thought, there might be some grave disapproval since they were staying together in a small one bed apartment. Perhaps just going along with it was the best course of action.

She gave a weak smile and went up the stairs. The apartment was dark and Malfoy lay on the bed as she walked in.

"That was totally unnecessary." She stated.

"Perhaps." Was all he said.

Hermione didn't know what to do with herself now. There wasn't much to do in the apartment at night. The naked bulb in the middle of the room gave off an awful light that wasn't good for anything. She couldn't risk using her wand in case she was seen, so she just leaned back on the small table in the corner.

Her lips were still burning from the kiss, which just confused her. Getting kissed by Malfoy was the oddest, most surreal thing that had ever happened to her. Except maybe getting the letter telling her she was a witch.

She could hear the creaks as Malfoy got off the bed. And even though she could see his white shirt in the dark, having him move around made her nervous.

"But it was very interesting." He said and came towards her.

"How? How was that interesting?" Hermione asked disbelievingly.

"What's the matter, Granger. Never been kissed before?"

“Of course I have.” She refuted. “Just not...”

He kissed her again, and again the electricity shot through her. Ok, now she was officially confused. The kiss deepened and a further bolt of electricity shot through her and moved deeper into her mouth.

Her mind tried to analyse, but the sensations were overwhelming. Any minute now she would stop this. It was just so nice for a kiss not to be awkward for once. Not the awkward for first kisses with Ron, or the awkward we're having sex kisses and then the awkward let's pretend you didn't desert us at the darkest hour kisses. Kissing Draco Malfoy was so beyond comprehension, there just wasn't an awkward to match.

Truthfully it was nice to have something else from the person who had so completely and persistently rejected her since childhood. In a way it took away some of the validation and conviction to the nasty things he had said to her over the years.

Any minute now she would stop pull away and yell at him. It just got a little harder when the pulled her even closer and moved down to her neck. She could hear his heavy breaths in her ear. Any minute now she would stop this. His hands were in her hair and he pulled her back for another kiss and his tongue was calling hers to play.

One of his hands moved down to her breast and the sensations made her gasp. He was swinging her around and they were next to the bed now. He was taking her to the bed. She should stop this, but the heat was building up so deliciously in her belly. She wanted more, but any minute now, she would come to her senses. It was Malfoy that was making her feel like this. How the hell did this happen? But why shouldn't she, her mind was questioning. What's the worst that could happen? He'd end up hating her more, call her names, that would be a change.

Her body was begging her and his weight coming down on top of her resolved the argument really. Her legs just seemed to form to him and in a heart beat, he was there, in position, waiting for her to give permission. All she could see was burning desire in his eyes. The point of absolutely no return.

When she reached up to kiss him, he took it as his permission and entered her. The sensations flooded her body and caught her breath. She felt like her whole body was vibrating and that she could not exist without this. A couple of long deep strokes was all it took. She was tipping over the edge and pulled him as close as she could as the waves washed over her. He was fighting his own battle and she could hear his loud groan as he found release.

He was completely gone from the world for a few seconds as Hermione started to gather her thoughts. She really didn't know how she felt about this when the fog started to lift from her mind. It was still the most surreal thing ever. Certainly not part of the vacation she had planned.

And every single damned pensioner down there knew what was going on up here, even though it'd been a complete surprise to her.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

They didn't go to Brazil the next week. They just ended up staying put by neither mentioning a plan to leave.

It had been awkward waking up the next morning after the night they first danced downstairs and then the stuff upstairs happened, but not talking about such things, just kind of smoothed it all over. Not to mention that they had sex just about every time they were anywhere near the bed. Every night, every morning, sometimes in between.

Hermione decided she wasn't going to question it, so she didn't really and they didn't really talk about it in any depth. They had this unmentioned rule that they wouldn't talk about politics, friends, relations, the wizard world, Hogwarts, or even the muggle world. It didn't leave much for indepth debates, but they were otherwise occupied.

Most days they would go out somewhere. Walk the streets, drive along the coast, sometimes to the inland water fall pool that was usually deserted on the weekdays. Hermione would cook in the early evenings after they went out and got provisions.

Malfoy was learning Spanish at a lightning rate, compliments of knowing French, Italian and Latin. Hermione didn't have the same head for languages, but whereas before him doing something she couldn't would be gut wrenching, it was now gut wrenching for an entirely different reason and it usually led back to bed.

Malfoy had starting reading Spanish books by local authors and a few Hemingways along the way. Hermione had taken up drawing and she was actually pretty good, she discovered. She drew the sceneries they came across, and sometimes she would draw Draco. He was a subject of endless fascination, particularly naked and sleeping.

Sometimes in the evenings, they would go downstairs and dance. Hermione loved going down and dancing with him. It always seemed to make him laugh and then he would get that look in his eye that just made her melt. She liked having his hands on her and she was starting to feel his absence when he wasn't with her.

She knew his touch so well now, to the point where she couldn't really tell where she ended and he began. His taste, his lips, his breath. And the way he made her feel when he was inside her.

Sometimes they would just go for little drives without any destination at all. She loved melting into him whenever they went anywhere on their little bike, just letting him take her wherever he felt like.

It was all perfect. They didn't really need anything within this nice little bubble they lived in. It was all so entirely unexpected, but she didn't question it. She didn't want to analyse it, didn't care what it meant. Absolutely no thoughts about the future. She didn't call it love. She didn't define it, it just was.

And the weeks were just slipping away. Before she knew it, they had been there two months. The spectre of going back to the UK was starting to creep in. They were both going back to Hogwarts in the fall and the date was relentlessly getting closer.

“Why don’t we just stay here?” Draco suggested one day as they rested inside away from the midday sun.

“Don’t be silly. We have to do our NEWTs.” Hermione laughed and hit him with a pillow.

“What for?” Draco snorted and pulled her down beneath him on the bed. “Complete waste of time if you ask me. There are some much more important things to do.”

Hermione could only chuckle as he kissed her.

“Besides, I am pretty sure you already know everything that will be covered in the NEWTs exams, so why bother.”

“Because we need NEWTs if we are ever going to get a job at the Ministry.”

“Bull.” He whispered and played with her earlobe.

“Well maybe not for you, but I do.” She said. Both knowing that this was the edge of the allowable limits for conversation in their little world.

“I don’t want to go back.” He said and settled his head down on her chest.

“We have to. Besides, you’re needed back home.” She said referring to Lucius Malfoy’s trial. Again brushing the boundary of conversation.

“I just... I don’t know.” He sighed, but before long was distracted by the softness he was resting on.

The last week was spent pretty much like the weeks prior, but there was a tinge of something to it as the end was approaching all too quickly.

They decided they were going to go to New Orleans and organise a portkey home. They would have to fly the muggle way out of Cuba because apparating over water was dangerous even for short distances.

Hermione was actually a little sad to say goodbye to the little apartment, but Draco took her hand and they were off.

New Orleans was hot and crowded. The magical section of it was blissfully tranquil compared to the muggle part. Draco found a hotel that was so opulent that Hermione felt a little uncomfortable. The whole room was white and gold with white carpets her feet sunk into. The bathroom was Italian marble and the bed was enormous.

Draco organised the portkey for the next morning, then took her to an equally opulent restaurant. The food was amazing, but Hermione felt a little uneasy. This was his world. This is what he was used to and he was at the very top of the heap in this world, with the little nuisance of his father’s trial being a temporary blemish. Hermione was somewhere shunted to the side of the bottom of this heap and this was the type of restaurant that typically didn’t catered to people like her, or anyone she called friends.

She did hold him a little tighter that night. Neither of them slept much.

The next day the port key took them to a building that was right next to the Ministry.

"I'll give you some money for the trip." He said.

"Don't worry about it." She said, "I am sure the last evening more than made up for it."

They were both now going to apparate home.

"I'll see you tomorrow." He said, referring to the Hogwarts Express.

"Yeah."

A last kiss, lasting a little bit longer than was appropriate for a 'see you later kiss', and he apparated away.

Hermione got home and dropped her backpack on the floor in the hall. Her parents came rushing out wanting to know how her trip went. Clara had come home with some German guy a week earlier.

Hermione talked for a few hours about her trip, which skipped over some important parts and some intended countries, but her parents didn't pry even though they would occasionally swap looks.

In the end she'd convinced them she'd had a great time.

The next morning was a rush as she quickly had to go to Diagon Alley to get her school things before apparating to Kings Cross. She had a brief chat with Seamus at Diagon Alley, but she had to rush off. He wouldn't be returning to Hogwarts this year.

Returning to Hogwarts was pretty much optional for people who had attended last year, more mandatory for those like herself and Ron if they wanted NEWTs certificates. Harry didn't need to, he could pretty much do whatever he wanted.

She saw her friends for the first time in months on the platform. She first spotted Ginny, then Neville. To her surprise she also saw Harry, Ron and George. She gave them all a hug.

She was especially surprised to see Harry, but it soon became clear that an extra year of youthful irresponsibility started to look really attractive compared to the politics at the Ministry. Besides, he wanted to set a good example, he said.

Ron was here because his mother made him, obviously she had managed to pull George into tow as well. Maybe the fact that she had killed Bellatrix Lestrange had put her flock a little more in awe of her and what she wants.

They asked about her trip and she explained that she'd had the best time. Spent more time in Cuba than she intended to, but New Orleans was nice as well. She left out any detail about the company, more out of a complete lack of ideas about how to bring the topic up. In the end, her holiday was not interesting enough to delve too deeply into, compared to the upcoming Quiddich try outs. Every single person standing there was a shoe in for the Gryffindor team, but they were all discussing who they want to fill the rest of the team with.

Hermione snuck a look over at the Slytherins and caught sight of Draco standing in the Slytherin crowd. Hermione's heart skipped a beat when she saw him and her attention seemed

to draw his. They exchanged looks for a second before Ron bumped her with his elbow to point out some man walking down the platform.

“That’s the new Defence of the Dark Arts professor.” He said.

The group discussed the new professor as well as the general restructuring of Hogwarts now that McGonagall was Headmistress.

An hour into the ride, Hermione got restless with the Quiddich talk and went for a walk down the corridors. When she passed one of the toilets, an arm came from behind and pushed her into one. She knew by the scent who it was.

“Merlin I missed you last night.” He said and plundered her mouth.

She knew what he meant, she had ached for him too. She wanted all of him and shaking hands were fumbling with his belt as she tried to unbuckle him. He lifted her up against the wall in the tiny compartment and sunk into her with a great groan. The lack of space only lent itself to some rushed jerks but it was enough to send them both over the edge. They actually stayed in the position much longer afterwards, just kissing.

Hermione returned to her friends a little flushed and feeling very mischievous. No one really noticed her flushed state and she was thrilled by the idea of having such a secret. She had never kept a secret like this before.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7

It was bizarre to be back at Hogwarts. Hermione felt like she was too old for school and she was pretty sure Harry, George and Ron felt the same. Although Harry and Ginny got back to doing what they did best these days and it typically didn't involve anyone else. Lavender had followed Ron back to Hogwarts as well so they were rarely seen outside of class either.

George was struggling a bit being back. Fred's absence seemed a continual drain on him and the best distraction he found was to work. He tended to spend more time studying than he ever had in his life, even rivalling Hermione who just couldn't find the same joy in it now. He said the joke shop, while still running and quite profitable, just wasn't somewhere he wanted to be now, not without Fred.

Her and Harry were made prefects for Gryffindor, along with Ginny and another boy from Ginny's year. There were four prefects from each house, two from the repeating class and two from the official seventh years. The Heads were taken from the Ginny's year, as it would be unfair for them to miss out on becoming Heads because the previous year was repeating. Hermione mourned the loss of becoming a Head for a while as it was always something she had wanted, but there was nothing she could do about it.

Hermione didn't see much of Draco at first, just the occasional quick glance in the Main Hall or in class. He still scared first years, being the big bad resident Death eater didn't help and he wasn't doing much to be nice. It bothered Hermione, hating to see any of his old bullying ways even if they were tamed down a bit.

He had found her in the restricted section of the library as he still had a standing pass thanks to the late Professor Snape. Some evenings they would have sex in one of the further away isles. Doing it in complete silence seemed so utterly naughty and sometimes Hermione had to bite her hand to keep herself from crying out.

Having a classfull of additional eighteen and nineteen year olds in the school made the Room of Requirements fairly busy these days.

"You need to be nicer to the first years." Hermione chided him one night.

"Why?" Draco asked like she'd lost her mind.

"Because you're scaring them."

"So?" He said. "I made one of them cry yesterday." He laughed.

"You're horrible. Don't be such a bully. It's just unnecessary."

"But so much fun." He said and muzzled her ear. "I've had a hard on since I saw you in class this morning."

Hermione felt the thrill of anticipation rushing through her as he began to grind her to him.

“You have no idea what you do to me.” He whispered while moving his hands up her skirt to stroke her backside then moving towards the more sensitive parts in front. He liked watching her nipples get hard as he stroked her. In the end, she would just open for him and let him in between her thighs as her breath started turning into pants.

Him entering her was just heaven. It really was the be all and end all as far as she was concerned. In the heat of the moment, there was nothing to compare with it. Nothing she would trade it for and couldn't imagine not doing this constantly, forever. She didn't think she could deny him even if she tried.

“Are you going to cheer for me in the Quiddich match this weekend?” He said after they had gotten their breath back.

“In secret.” She said with a sly smile. Knowing full well that she could never, ever root for him in the upcoming Slytherin — Gryffindor match.

“I'm going to win.” He said, and with a low, seductive whisper he continued, “And you should think about the things I am going to do to you afterwards.”

Harry won and Draco had a murderous look on his face. Harry did notice and gloat somewhat. This seemed to put Draco in a worse mood and he glared briefly at Hermione standing with her house mates before sharply turning and stalking off the field.

She got the feeling that she had done something wrong in his eyes, but couldn't quite understand what. But she didn't get a chance to ask him about his odd behaviour as he was absent from school much of the next month due to his father's trial.

When he returned and they met in the restricted section to the library, she tried to talk about it, but he was not paying attention. He wasn't even pretending like he was listening, and was still taking off her clothes while making fun of the fact that he was making fake attempts at listening. In the end, Hermione could only laugh as he determinedly moved towards the only goal he would consider at the moment and that was being naked and straining inside her.

Being apart for a month had been really hard. She had ached for him, so badly that sometimes she had to retort to relieving the tension on her own. Which is a fraught affair in the middle of the night in a dorm.

Apparently Lucius' trial was progressing nicely with some of the most damaging evidence being overturned or discredited, some in perhaps not the most ethical of ways. Another month, he should be free, according to Draco's expectations.

Hermione still didn't feel comfortable talking about Malfoy Senior and his imminent re-entry into society. But she didn't have to consider it for very long, Draco was very good at distracting her.

“So you haven't told Potty and Weasel?” He asked when they were dressing.

“Of course not. They would never understand.” She said.

“So I'm you're dirty little secret then?” He teased.

“I'm sure you haven't told anyone either.” She stated.

“True.”

He stood behind her and Hermione could feel his breath on her neck and it sent goosebumps all down her body. He gently bent her over a table, holding her hands down with his fingers entwined in hers. She couldn't move unless he let her. A signal in her brain told her to panic, but she suppressed it. He entered her gently from behind. It went against everything she'd been taught. To never, ever give someone else control. Never give your control to a man. She had never given control to someone else at all. Constant vigilance, had been drummed into her for as long as she can remember. Her not being in control was dangerous, she needed to be the one who sees the unexpected, predicts the outcome and finds solutions. If she wasn't in control someone would die.

Letting him have the control was so utterly forbidden, but it still felt so right and exhilarating at this particular moment. The sensations were mixed with a swirl of emotions. It felt so good to trust him. 'Never show them your soft underbelly', her grandmother had said to her one day and she never had. But it was so tiring to never let go. Never to trust. She'd never truly trusted Ron, not to the point where she would be vulnerable. He'd proved her right too.

It was so deliciously naughty too, because this wasn't making love. This was being fucked and she trusted him with it. She could feel the tension building as he picked up speed and it exploded in her as they both found release.

Another secret to keep. Harry and Ron would never understand what she had just let him go to her. Ginny might, but probably not. Not with Malfoy. Maybe no one could.

They got dressed and kissed for a while before having to leave as the library was closing.

"I would be crushed to find that you weren't on my side." He said while giving her a final groping.

"What are you talking about sides?" She asked. "I thought we were done with sides. Look at the trouble its caused over the last five years."

"I'm just saying. I need you to be loyal."

Hermione didn't quite know how to respond. She wasn't exactly sure what he was referring to, but she nodded. She certainly wasn't going to be with anyone else.

The statement bugged her all throughout the next day. She mulled it over. She had never given him any indication that she would be with anyone else. But equally she couldn't understand his thought on sides. Was he referring to Quiddich?

She didn't end up seeing him for a few days and was distracted with Prefect duties. The occasional glimpses of him in class would just get her all hot and bothered, so she tried not to, because she would just lose the ability to keep up with the lecture.

She got heart palpitations whenever she looked at him, particularly when he'd catch her and pin her down with the intense stare that she would avoid at all costs in the past. She would fight for him, she decided, if it ever came to that. No one might ever understand what she'd done, but she would fight for it if she had to. He was worth it, she acknowledge with a smile.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8

The next month went by at a quick pace. Draco was gone for chunks of it and colder weather was setting in. Most of the school was slowly starting to wind down from the war. At first, being at school seemed so redundant, but life was starting to return to a more even keel. The first Hogsmead week end was coming up and the common room had a bit of a buzz to it.

Ginny had started questioning her about romantic interests. Hermione had done her absolute best to distract her onto conversations. She still didn't want to tell anyone about her thing with Draco. It wasn't anyone else's concern, she justified. She did manage to convince Ginny that her main and only focus was on her studies. And if all else failed, she would bring up Quidditch because it was a guaranteed topic changer.

The release of Lucius Malfoy seemed to quieten the buzz for a few days, but everyone moved on. It seemed to put a spring in the Slytherins' step too and Draco was back to being king.

The Daily Prophet seemed to have moved on too. There was the odd mention of Death eaters being chased, but on the whole, the war was yesterday's news and no one was really complaining.

Quidditch rivalry was as strong as ever, and while Hermione rolled her eyes at it, her support was demanded from both sides. Hermione went to the games with the Gryffindor crowd and she had to admit to herself that watching it was much more amusing now that she could muse on how spectacular Draco looked in the uniform.

They still met up in the library late in the evenings. Draco's mood was starting to change a bit with his father's release. All his worries seemed to have gone and he was enjoying being back at school. Particularly the part where he was yet again a paragon of Slytherin virtue. He even asked her to sneak away with him to Switzerland over the Christmas holidays, not that she could, Christmas was for family and hers, nor the Weasley's would understand if she wasn't there.

"Why would you want to spend Christmas with them?" He asked with an incredulous look. "Shivering in the dusty hovel they live in."

Hermione shoved his arm.

"I love spending Christmas with the Weasleys, they have invited my parents this year, so we will all be together."

Draco made gagging noises.

"You're not suggesting that I spend time with your parents are you?" She asked.

"Only is you're suicidal." Draco snorted.

“So they wouldn’t accept me coming over for dinner then?” She continued somewhere between joking and serious.

“You know they wouldn’t.”

“So under no circumstances, would they accept that we’re... you know?”

“They never need to know.” He said. “Father has always had a mistress, mother has never asked, neither will my wife.”

“You’re wife.” Hermione repeated.

“I will keep you in whatever style you want. You can have the best of everything. Your own apartment. Jewels, whatever.”

“You can’t be serious.” She said.

Draco look let her know that he had been anticipating this conversation.

“You know I can’t give you any more.” He said quietly.

“You can’t seriously think that I would be happy with that.”

“Its the only way.”

Hermione was having a bit of trouble keeping her emotions in check. She searched his face but he wasn’t joking. The turn of the conversation was making her feel like she’d been winded and she was starting to feel a bit nauseous.

He came up and folded his arms around her.

“Its the only way.” He repeated with a hint of sadness. “But it will be fine. You’ll see.”

“I...” She started. “I can’t live like that. I won’t.”

She could feel the tension in Draco’s arms as she said it.

“I have to go.” She said and walked out of his arms. She could feel her pulse buzzing in her ear as she grabbed her bag and made to leave.

“Don’t walk away.” She heard Draco saying quietly behind her.

“I have to go.” She said again, not able to look at him. She was walking to the door.

“Hermione.” He heard him call behind her, but she didn’t stop.

When she got out into the hall, she let out the breath she’d been holding but was struggling to draw breath again. She felt like she’d been punched in the stomach. She had to stop and bend over to catch her breath again.

She hadn’t seen that coming. Tears were stinging the back of her eyes as she made her way back to the Gryffindor common room. She’d never stated any expectations to herself about this relationship, but being confronted by its shortcomings was just crushing.

She headed straight through the common room and up to her bed where she curled up under her blankets and cried as quietly as she could manage.

She felt like someone had taken her world and given it a good shake. Her expectations of the world had proven false. Or maybe it was just her expectations of him. How could she have been so stupid? She'd talked herself into believing that he had changed, but he hadn't. And she recognised that he probably hadn't changed at all, but somehow she had read all these untruths into it.

What hurt the most was that he wouldn't fight for her. She had made her mind up that she would come what may, but he wouldn't. Withstanding everything else, that was a deal breaker.

She could certainly never agree to his expectations that she would be the other woman hidden away somewhere while he got on with setting up his family and general life. But he felt fine with her foregoing those things. He couldn't honestly expect that she would forego having kids, a husband, a nice loving family life.

Her relationship with Draco was over. He'd never actually deceived her, they'd just spackled over the uncomfortable truths and ignored them.

The next few days dragged at slow speed. Hermione felt like there was a Dementor following her around sucking every ounce of joy out of the world. Draco tried to catch her eye in class, but she refused to look at him.

She didn't go to the library at night, instead staying in the common room trying to distract herself. Ron was animatedly acting out something that had happened in the halls involving some spectacular fall down the stairs by a fifth year Hufflepuff. She tried to smile, but it was more of a grimace.

Of course they noted her distance and lack of enthusiasm, but she blamed it on women's issues which everyone seemed to accept without question.

She continually kicked herself for being so hopelessly stupid. She'd managed to dupe herself, all on her own and she couldn't really figure out why. And with him of all people.

She was so desperate for distraction that she had even started helping Hagrid with the feeding of his various 'friends'. At least he wasn't starting to give her concerning looks like the others and just let her carry on with the task at hand, while he chattered away about topics she didn't listen to. Her fingers were stiff with the cold, but she didn't mind, feeling like she deserved a bit of pain for being such a complete idiot.

On returning to the castle on the dreadful and rainy Sunday afternoon, she got cornered in the covered walkway by Draco. Hermione stopped as she saw him. She could either go forward or backwards, but didn't want to seem cowardly by running away.

"So you're ignoring me now?" He said leaning against the wall.

Hermione shifted on her legs, uncomfortable with the situation.

"So you're just not going to speak to me anymore?" He continued.

"What do you want me to say?"

"How about you explain what's going on. One minute everything is fine and then its not."

“Don’t give me that. You can’t act surprise. We just reached the natural limit to our relationship.” She said.

He didn’t say anything this time and just stared at her.

“You can’t be with me and I can’t be with you. That pretty much sums it up, don’t you think.” She stated.

“We can be.” He said.

“Not in a way that acceptable.”

“You mean respectable.” He threw at her.

Hermione stared at him.

“Like I give a toss.” She said. “How can you ask me to give up a life of my own, children? Sit around and just wait for you while you live your life. Don’t you know me at all?”

It was his turn to shift uncomfortably.

“I am doing the best I can.” He said quietly.

Hermione nodded. “Not good enough.”

She continued to walk past him.

“Don’t walk away from me.” He said, same as he had the last time she saw him.

“You expect me to give up everything.” He shouted and walked up behind her. “For some stupid romantic notion you have that it means something.”

“I don’t expect anything.” She shouted back. “We had a great time, its over, get used to it.”

“So that’s it, thanks for the fuck and its over?” He said and grabbed her by the arm.

“Let go of me.” She warned.

“You’re a fucking tease, you know that?” He said.

“Tease you with what? Some idea that we were forever? That was always unrealistic. Better to end it now before someone gets hurt.” She said. “It was a nice notion, but back to reality now.

She was trying to convince herself more than anything.

“You’ll regret this Granger.” He said.

“Probably, but I’d regret it more if I didn’t sort this now.” She shot back.

She walked for a few steps then started running because the tears were coming whether she wanted it or not. She wanted to get away before her resolve gave. It hurt more then she’d ever anticipate to walk away from this relationship, but what option did she have? Neither of them could accept the other’s terms, so better to abandon this game before it got too far. Or before she couldn’t walk away.

It was the relationship that was never supposed to be after all. You can’t go against the prevailing wind, particularly is one didn’t have the stomach for it. She wished she could hit

something.

Chapter 9

Chapter Nine

Hermione managed to convince herself pretty quickly that the break-up was best for everyone. Finally giving her mind a chance to voice its opinion only confirmed it. She'd been functioning on something other than logic for the last few months and whatever it was, probably hormones, had its day.

She was actually glad that it was over, keeping her dirty little secret lost its novelty. She was glad that was all straightened out now. She didn't like lying to her friends.

"Why is Malfoy staring at you?" Ginny said one morning in the Great Hall.

Hermione snuck a quick look and he was staring daggers at her. She had already decided that the best course of action was to ignore him as much as possible and do her absolute best to not be in the same place. She knew his schedule pretty well, so she had a good idea where he would most likely be.

"I have never tried to understand why Malfoy does anything," Hermione said and returned her attention to the Daily Prophet. "Why start now?"

So maybe the lying wasn't entirely over.

Sadly, the daggers directed at her continued in class as well. It did make her uncomfortable but she did her best to ignore it. If she was completely honest, it hurt like hell, but she was giving her analytical mind free rein and it seemed to well adapt to suppress any sentimentality she had. She vowed that she was not going to 'go out' with anyone else this year. She obviously had the most atrocious taste in romantic interests and she really couldn't be trusted.

Draco's constant attention was wearing on her. She was having trouble keeping track of what she was going with this particular potion, she may even had gotten a couple of the directions switched around. Damn him. He was doing this on purpose, trying to get her off balance.

After class, she wasn't quite quick enough due to the mess she had made all over the table, which left him room to pin her down as she left class. She cursed Harry for his enthusiasm to go to Quidditch training, leaving her to clean up and walk back alone. Didn't it ever occur to him that she might need help?

"So I don't get a say in this?" Draco said as he blocked her way.

"No." She answered and waited out the silence. "You know this is the only way."

"Why does everything have to be so black and white with you? Should teach me for getting involved with a fucking Gryffindor." He said and walked away.

Hermione was left clutching her bag. It did hurt being reduced to a 'fucking Gryffindor', but she guessed she understood that he wasn't happy. Actually he made it out like this was all her fault, which it wasn't. This was his fault, she thought as she felt the anger pulsing through

her veins. He is the one who wouldn't fight. She was ready to take on the world and he was ready to deceive the world for the sake of the relationship. Not even close, how dare he blame this on her. Effin coward.

Her bad mood settled in for a stay. And now she couldn't even have her evenings in the library anymore. Turning up in the library would just send the wrong message and she couldn't really trust herself. Because her body does not seem to have caught up on the whole break up thing. Judging by the things she saw in her head whenever she let her mind drift, it wasn't even close.

The tension was getting to her, giving her a headache. Maybe a nice leisurely bath in the prefects' bathroom would be the ideal activity tonight. A chance to unwind and there would be no chance of him being there as he wasn't a prefect. She guessed being a Deatheater was a bit of a drawback when being considered. Actually it was amazing that he was let back into Hogwarts.

The Hogsmead weekend was a thing of undue excitement really. Even for those who would normally be jaded with numerous Hogsmead weekends past. There was even an early snow fall to complete the picturesque walk down to the little village. After stocking up on supplies, which tended to be more about sweets for Harry and Ron, pretty much the same as it had for the last 5 years. Hermione had a look through the book store, while Ginny was more interested in ready made potions.

After a while walking around the snow feeling like they were third years all over again, they went to the Three Broomsticks to get a bit of lunch. It was sweltering hot in there with too many people seeking refuge from the cold.

Hermione ordered a steak pie with her butter beer and they sat around and chatted for a while. Even George made the trip out and he was on relatively good form for once. He was even chatting with fifth year girl who obviously had the biggest crush on him. Being twenty, he was somewhat of a catch in the eyes of the girls. Particularly as he had his own successful business already.

Lunch had been fun, it had been a while since they had hung out and laughed together as a group. It even picked up Hermione's mood until a chance parting of the crowd revealed the Slytherins on the other side of the room. Particularly a blond one lavishing his attention of a pretty blond Slytherin girl. Lavishing his tongue more like. She only glimpsed it for a minute, but it nearly froze her insides solid.

She tried to reason with herself. This was good. He had moved on. At lightning speed, no less. But whatever she told herself it gutted her that she had been replaced so quickly.

The good atmosphere was gone and Hermione started to feel suffocated by all the people and the heat. She quickly excused herself and ran out the door. As much as she hated it, she was going to cry again and she was not a cryer, damn it. A brisk walk to the Shrieking Shack sorted it out. She got the hurt and the shock out and ended up rubbing snow on her eyelids to get rid of their redness.

It was for the best, she reasoned, better off getting it done now than later. She felt like a right twit being so hurt by it. Even worse was her feeling of ownership of him, because it felt

like that other girl was touching something that belonged to her. Irrational as the feelings were, she was smart enough to recognise them at least.

Once she'd calmed down she started walking back to village. Her jeans were wet and she used her wand to drive the moisture out of them. When she got to the edge of the village she heard raised voices and when she came around the corner she was a group of slytherins harassing a girl. Not just any girl, a third year muggleborn.

She couldn't believe that she heard one of them calling her mudblood and the others laughing. Hermione felt her blood boil. She'd fought a god damn war to ensure these arseholes knew their place.

She whipped out her wand and sent a hex that snapped like a bullwhip. The boy winced loudly and they all whipped around to face her. She was still a well known war hero and none of them were game enough to take her on. Her skills were after all legendary now.

"What did you call her you piece of shit." She said shaking with anger. Unfortunately the older Slytherins were walking around the corner as well.

"I called her a mudblood." The offending boy said with confidence that seemed ready to desert him if she so much as moved a muscle. It grew somewhat as he noticed the older Slytherins backing them up. "Because that's what she is."

"Why don't you say that to my face." She said quietly with so much intensity the birds stopped chirping.

The boy gulped and took a step backwards. The whole group was quiet and avoiding her eye.

"I will." Draco said standing with his arm around the blond girl. "Mudblood."

Hermione couldn't believe what he had just said. She was completely stunned. And it probably hurt more than anything else he had ever done to her. Hermione stared into his eyes, but she was too disgusted to look at him. His betrayal was like a punch in the gut.

"Guess you're all confident now that your daddy is out of prison." She said, feeling an intense desire to hurt him. "How many times has your daddy been in prison, Malfoy? Actually it seems to be an infliction for most members of your family. At what point do your family become prison trash? Call me what you want, but don't have some glorious delusions about yourself."

She could tell that she'd made him furious. His lips drew together into a tight line and he was unhooking his arm from the girl and whipped his wand out.

"Go ahead." She challenged. "We all know where you'd end up."

They stood there for a few seconds, while Draco considered his rather limited options.

"Didn't think so." She finished and walked away.

Her hands were completely shaking as she walked around the corner and out of sight. She couldn't believe he'd turned on her. She was pretty proud of herself for being cool like a cucumber throughout. Seriously, who did he think he was dealing with. If that's the way he wanted to play it, she sure as hell wasn't going to wilt and back down.

Damn it, she was going to cry again.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10

Hermione felt awful the next day. She had swung back and forth between being angry and sad all through the night. Around four in the morning she gave up and went down to the common room. She tried reading, but was too tired to take anything in.

She still couldn't believe that Draco had turned on her. She could understand that he wasn't happy about the break up, but still some loyalty to your ex was expected. And then the hypocrisy, calling her a mudblood considering what he had been doing with this one. Then again, she had never been good enough for a real relationship, had she. She was something he would hide forever.

This was all his fault and if he was taking the breakup badly, then it was what he deserved. She just hoped that he wasn't going to return to his former creepy self. Surely some maturity had been gained. Anyway, it wasn't her problem anymore. Time to move on, she decided.

With that, Hermione managed to get some peace of mind and her tired body took over as her overactive mind settled down.

She slept until three in the afternoon, which isn't necessarily unusual on the weekends for teenagers, but it certainly was for her.

"Is there something you're not telling me about?" Ginny said over dinner. "Or rather someone?"

"No." Hermione said trying to look sincere.

"So what exactly were you doing last night?" Ginny asked.

"I just couldn't sleep, worried about stuff." Hermione said, at least that was true. She felt awful about lying. "There might have been a little flirtation that ended badly."

"Pray tell." Ginny said with a sly smile.

"It never, ever bares mentioning again. It was stupid and its totally over, and I don't want to talk about it."

"I'm sure you'll tell me when you're ready." Ginny continue.

Don't count on it, Hermione thought. At least Draco wasn't staring daggers at her anymore. He wasn't even looking her way at all. There was an irrational twinge of hurt, but Hermione threw the sentiment aside as soon as it arose.

He was ignoring her completely in class the next day. Hermione was caught between being hurt and being relieved. Maybe it was time to put the whole thing behind her.

A few days passed and her life seemed to be acquiring a new equilibrium. She even had the library back. Hermione had gotten on top of some of the work she had neglected and she was enjoying spending time with her friends without the whole lying part.

After leaving Ancient Runes, she was walking back to the common room, distractedly thinking about the five parchment essay she needed to write.

“Whore.” She heard someone say as they passed her.

Hermione head shot up to see Pansy Parkinson’s retreating back. Hermione was a bit stunned. As it was only the two of them in the hall, she couldn’t have caught a snippet of a conversation. Had Pansy Parkinson just called her a whore? What in the world had just happened? Well this was a new dimension to their rather shallow relationship, which mostly consisted of ‘mudblood’, ‘bookworm’ or ‘know it all cow’. This was new and it was out of norm. Where had this come from?

Realisation dawned on Hermione. Draco had been talking about her. She didn’t know what he’d said, but judging from her reception from Pansy, she could well imagine. Then again, Pansy would call her a whore if Draco had quoted sentiments from Romeo and Juliet. But deep down, Hermione knew that whatever he had said, it wasn’t nice. He wasn’t proclaiming his endless love. It just wasn’t his style.

Immature git, Hermione swore, along with a list of choice names. She still stood rooted to the spot. Mortified at what he’d done and even more mortified about what people were thinking about her. She was used to being criticised for knowing things, but she had never been called a whore. There was nothing in her arsenal to deal with this. It hurt like hell and damn it, she was tearing up again.

Nothing she did or told herself would stop the tears from flowing. All she could do was to run back to the dorm and pull the blankets over her head. She even knocked Neville over in the process and wasn’t capable of apologising. She would have to do it later.

“Just a silly little flirtation, huh?” Ginny said later in the evening to Hermione’s drawn curtains.

“I’ve got PMS.” Hermione called from insider her little haven. She wasn’t going to come out, because the state of her would tell that she had been sobbing her eyes out.

Being hurt had passed pretty readily. Her stupidity for getting involved with Draco Malfoy stinged more at this point, but worse was the fear of what her friends would say. But if she knew anything, there would now be rumours spreading around the school as she lay here. Slytherin’s loved a bit of gossip to hurt people and the intention was to hurt. Even by the non-existing chance that Draco wasn’t trying to, Pansy definitely would and she would be painting the thing in the worst light possible.

Later in the evening, once Hermione had calmed down and the kiddies had all gone to bed, she went downstairs. She had decided that she would have to face this bull, horns straight on.

They were all sitting around the fireplace. George was reading, Harry and Ron was playing chess while Neville was working on some contraption. Ginny was writing on a piece of parchment. It couldn’t have been a more comfortable scene in her estimation. Maybe one she wouldn’t be a part of anymore after this.

“This summer.” Hermione started with a shaky voice, but steely determination made her spit it out. “I spent the summer in Cuba with Draco Malfoy.”

“Funny Hermione.” George said. “I spent the summer with Banshee on the Shetland Islands.”

The strange turn of conversation surprised everyone.

“No I’m serious, I spent the summer with Draco Malfoy. I didn’t intend to, it just ended up that way. You see at the trial...”

“Stop messing around.” Ron said.

“Ron.” Hermione started but couldn’t finish. They knew she was serious by the tone of her voice.

The room was completely quiet. She had never believed in the idea that you could hear a pin drop, but now she knew it was probably true.

“Oh.” Was all that could be heard as Ginny realised that it had been more than a passing acquaintance.

“Wer...” Harry started.

“Did you sleep with him?” Ron piped up.

Hermione could only chew on her lip and look down on the carpet.

“Have you lost your mind?” Ron yelled.

“Wha...Why?” Harry said at the same time. “This must be some kind of joke. And its a bad one.”

Hermione didn’t have a response, so just stood there.

Ron stormed off. Harry stayed for a while trying to catch her eye, before giving up and leaving, followed by Ginny.

“Wow.” George said. “That was uncomfortable. A big fart is just as effective at clearing a room. I better go see that Ron isn’t throwing my stuff around.”

Neville was the only one left.

“Strange things happen.” He said and Hermione looked up. A shaky smile told him that she appreciated his support.

“Sorry for knocking you over before.” She said. “I was a bit...”

“Don’t worry about it.” He said. “Are you coming to the match this weekend?”

“I think I might give it a pass.” Hermione said. The thought of being ignored and ostracised was bad enough, having to suffer through it and a match was too much.

The equilibrium she had found was gone again. She spent the next couple of days in the dorm or the library. No one disturbed her. Neville was always nice and she would never in her life forget that. He even brought her some dinner in the evening, when she couldn’t bare going down.

It was obvious that Ron was furious, Harry was confused and Ginny was withdrawn. Lavender kept of giving her dirty looks.

The library was again her safe haven and the books were the distraction she needed. Books and Neville the only things you can truly rely on in this world, she had decided. But thinking about it only made her teary again. She had never cried so much in her life as she had over the last month. Maybe during the losses in the war, but she was so sick of crying.

Ginny did find her in the library one evening.

“What the hell?” She said.

“It just happened.” Hermione responded before explaining the circumstances of Malfoy following them and then Clara deserting her. “But I’m still nothing more than a mudblood to him. That became obvious, so I broke it off.”

“Still, Malfoy, really?” Ginny said. “I’m sorry. I couldn’t have been easy telling us.”

“I’m sorry for the whole mess.” Hermione said, “But it happened and now I have to deal with it.”

“I still can’t understand how you could even touch the ferret.” Ginny said with a shiver.

“Believe me, if I had an answer to give you, I would.” Hermione said.

“So more than a flirtation then?”

“Just a tad. Unfortunately.”

Chapter 11

Chapter 11

Things got progressively worse the next week. Everyone in the school seemed to have found out. People were whispering and leering at her where ever she went. She could understand the way Harry felt when everyone doubted his character and sanity. And it was awful when people hushed their conversation and watched her as she walked past.

Harry and Ron weren't talking to her and Ginny was a bit stand-offish. George seemed to be fascinated by her new status as a piranha, as her motives for the relationship were now reported as seeking to improve her social status with a healthy dose of gold digging. At least someone found it interesting, she thought, although it did worry her a bit that George seemed more interested by the whole process rather than any injustice being done to her.

The common room was uncomfortable and unwelcoming. Anywhere else was pretty much the same. Hermione ended up spending much of her free time in the library where no one seemed to bother her.

It all just sucked. The girls would whisper when she walked into the bathroom, down the hall, into the great hall, or anywhere else. The boys would give her knowing looks like they knew exactly what she got up to when the lights went out.

She started feeling anxious when a group of people were walking near her. But worst of all what that her friends were not standing by her. That really hurt. She could not think of anyone who she would ignore her friends for seeing. Ok, so maybe Lavender drove her around the bend and she didn't exactly respect Ron for choosing such an insipid girlfriend. But honestly, her lack of respect for Ron was more related to him than to the dull and stupid girl he chose to be with.

She was completely disinterested in class and the teachers were even calling on her to answer questions as she had now seemingly lost the ability to put her hand up. She'd never imagined a time when she'd hate being in school, but she had reached that point. Logically she knew it would pass. Eventually people would grow tired of the gossip and the constant attention would stop.

What really got her heckles up was that Draco was making jokes at her expense in potions class. She couldn't hear the joke, but the topic and the nature was pretty clear even across the room. She stared at him and he stared back, challenging her to do something about it. Anything she did would just be fodder for the gossip mills, so she went back to ignoring him, trying to focus on the stupid potion, which no one in their right mind would ever make anyway. When had they started learning such pointless and banal things?

Harry was still ignoring her as he worked on the next desk. She was so bitterly disappointed that he didn't stand by her. Ginny would eventually come around, but she wasn't sure Harry would. Why wouldn't they show her the loyalty she'd sworn to them. Ron was the first to jettison his loyalty, Draco, which wasn't really surprising to anyone with a semblance

of sanity, but now Harry, the one she'd sworn to support till the bitter end. He was now gone over some stupid summer romance.

Except sweet, steadfast Neville who hadn't even bat an eyelid over the whole thing. George was still talking to her, but there was something disturbing about his detachment from everything.

She still helped Hagrid with his various chores, even though it was getting really cold now. Christmas was coming up fast and her parents were intent on spending it in Germany this year.

Late one day when she was walking back from Hagrid's hut through the covered bridge, a group of Slytherins were coming the other way. The idea of being confronted with a group of Slytherins was horrible at the worst of times, but at the moment it was absolutely unbearable. The blond head bobbing in the small crowd made her feel even more uncomfortable. Her best hope for this situation was that he would be inclined to ignore her, but the look on his face when he saw her told her that was not the case today.

"Granger." He said sweetly.

She only did a slight tick of her head as a response.

"What are you doing?" He said quietly with the familiar sneer on his face. "Out trawling the servants for company?"

"Fuck you Malfoy." She said.

"See I thought we'd already been there and done that." He said and picked up one of her hair locks off her shoulder."

"Don't touch me, Malfoy." She warned.

"Oh, but you used to call me Draco." He said with a false sweetness. "In fact you would scream it, didn't you, because you loved it when I touched you."

There were leers and giggles from the group behind him. Hermione could only marvel at how cowardly of him to have this conversation in a crowd.

"What's the matter, Malfoy. Too chicken shit to confront me without having your pathetic excuse for friends behind you?" She spat through her gritted teeth.

He feigned a look of hurt and said, "At least I have friends. But I am more than prepared to have this conversation alone, anytime you want Granger. Just name the place and I'll be there."

It sounded more like a proposition than a threat, and the further laughter from the group confirmed that he had scored a definite point in this match. Hermione could feel waves of anger and disgust washing over her.

"You're vile." Was all she could manage before turning and walking away. If she took him up on his offer to have it out in private, it sounded like she was asking for a bit of his attention, and if she refused, it sounded like she was scared.

"And that used to turn you on." She heard him calling after her.

Mother effin bastard, she screamed inside her head when she got around the corner. He had absolutely no honour at all. Or even class for that matter. Tact was way too much to hope for.

She didn't know how to fight in this way. The only real verbal sparring she'd had in her life had been with Malfoy, but it had never been on this level with so much ammunition on his side. This was on a much bigger scale than she'd ever experienced before and he had taken hostage all the experience they had shared in this war and was now using it against her. How did he end up with all the ammunition?

She'd look like an idiot if she'd denied it ever happened. He had too much on her for her to pull off denying being with him, especially since she had admitted it to her friends, and their rejection of her was full proof to everyone that it was true. She was now the official slut of Hogwarts. One little mistake seemed to wipe out everything else and far surpass the much more promiscuous behaviour of hoards of other girls. She had been the one stupid enough to make her mistake with Draco Malfoy and that was all her fault. And that fucking Cuban music.

Hermione pondered the situation for a few days, while the leering, snide remarks and over-loud whispers got worse from the slytherins, then the rest of the school. Her friends were as distant as ever and Hermione spent all of her meals with Neville, and sometimes George, although Ron was trying to give him flack for it.

Ginny would sometimes give her looks that weren't entirely hostile, but she wouldn't seem to cross the line of publicly supporting her.

One afternoon, Hermione was confronted with another extremely uncomfortable when Pansy entered into the second floor girls bathroom that Hermione had started to use exclusively. Hermione kept her eyes fixed on the mirror as she was tying her hair into a ponytail.

"Oh, the mudblood slut." Pansy said with an exaggerated sigh, "Trying to tart yourself up. A hopeless cause, I'm afraid."

Hermione tried to grit her teeth and ignore the comment.

"Well, I hope you learned your lesson." Pansy said. "There are just certain places people like you shouldn't go."

Hermione continued to ignore her, while Pansy seemed to be waiting for a response.

"You should stay away from purebloods. You'd think that was obvious."

"Don't worry Pansy, I have learnt my lesson." Hermione said in a cool steady voice. "It really, and I mean really, wasn't worth the hassle. You people should get out more, because if that is all you have to offer, then you really are missing out. To spend your life with such bumbling incompetence would... well, just be a shame."

Hermione finished straightening her pony tail and turned to leave. The surprise on Pansy's was obvious. Well, if she was going to be known for her experience, true or not, Hermione thought, then that experience is going to count for something. Pansy's surprise gave away to mischievous glee. Hermione would bet her life that Pansy would make sure everyone knew of her judgement of Draco's performance.

That should shut him up, Hermione thought to herself with a smile as she walked out of the bathroom.

The smile continued all the next day, when Draco was back to staring daggers at her. The leering also seemed to have stopped although the whispers continued in earnest. Game, set and match.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12

Getting Draco back put a bit of a string in Hermione's step. He wasn't happy though, she could tell he was furious, but really, he brought in on himself. What was he expecting? That she would just fade away because he was mean to her?

Even better was the fact that she would be heading home for Christmas at the end of the week. A week away from here would be heaven. Even though her outlook was better than it had been, it was still draining not talking to her friends, being the topic of gossip and dealing with a nasty ex. Actually two nasty ex's. Ron in his sulky, snipy ways and Draco in the all out nastiness.

She had an agreement with herself, no more getting together with friends and no getting together with enemies. Well the first wasn't much of an issue, she didn't have many friends left.

She couldn't wait to leave school behind for a week, but there was the rest of the week to get through first.

Draco was staring at her throughout lunch. She met his gaze for a while before ignoring him and finishing her meal. Getting stared at seemed to diminish her appetite, although she would not admit that to herself or anyone else.

She was disturbed when Draco got up at the same time she did. She contemplated sitting down again, but forced herself to keep going. She was not going to change her behaviour because of him.

She reached the door before him, but she could hear him just behind her. He grabbed her by the arm and yanked her over towards one side.

"You're going to regret that, mudblood." He said, standing much too close. He was trying to intimidate her.

When did he get so tall.

"What, finishing breakfast?"

"Saying things about me."

"Well, I will heap it on my pile of regrets." She said airily.

He stared at her as he turned and stormed away. Hermione could still feel his grip on her arm long after he was gone. She had a bit of a twinge of worry at his threat, but what could he do? He had already destroyed her reputation and in the process taken a bit of damage to his own. The thought made her grin. She had precious few friends left and she doubted he could shake Neville. He really was running out of things he could do to her.

She decided that he didn't deserve anymore of her time. That was easier said than done as the idea of him sitting behind her in class, plotting away was a bit disconcerting. He was extremely resourceful. Having him as an enemy for close to a decade had told her that. Maybe he would just grow up and get over it. They weren't twelve for heaven's sake. Maybe a boyfriend would send the message that she had well and truly moved on. He certainly wasn't holding back in the moving on department himself, but she wasn't sure she could stomach another male at the moment. They seriously were more trouble than they were worth.

Her treacherous mind conceded that it had been lovely while it lasted. Ten times lovelier than it had been with Ron. But one day, she will find lovely again, with a nice stable man who would stand by her no matter what. Maybe she would have a look for such a man in the library, she decided, in the mythical creatures section.

The days dragged on and eventually departure day arrived. She dressed in jeans and a sweater. Normally, she felt a bit self-conscious in muggle clothes, but today it felt right. She was in a confrontational mood.

Harry, Ginny and Ron said a guarded goodbye to her as she left the common room to walk down to the train. She could have waited for the carriages, but she felt pretty desperate to get away, so a long walk as a great excuse to hasten departure. Neither Ron nor Harry were going home for Christmas. Why leave when they could spend a week in bed with their respective girlfriends.

The carriages passed her as she came close to the train station and she found a compartment with Neville and Padma. Both Hermione and Padma made a half hearted attempt at patrolling as their prefect duties required, but the train was pretty calm with the exception of the fifth years trying to show off for each other. Hermione felt a million miles away from the days of first kisses and crushes.

A couple of hours into the trip, she was busting and had to go to the toilet. It was a pretty tense affair as the last time she was in there, she hadn't been alone and the memories were enough to make her blush. He was on the train, she had seen him through the window of the door into the Slytherin cart. Luckily he wasn't reverting to his typical behaviour of roaming the train looking for someone to pick on. Maybe there was some hope that he would eventually grow up.

The week away was great. Germany was beautiful and the crisp cold was offset nicely by the warm fire in the hotel. Her parents were getting on well and it was a nice and sedate Christmas. She bought some CDs, read some fiction and watched movies on TV.

The day for heading back to Hogwarts seemed to arrive in a blink of an eye. She travelled straight to King's Cross from the airport and she felt like a dark cloud was settling down on her the closer she got to the train station.

Draco was on the platform, dressed in black as always, but she didn't stay on the platform to stare him down. She wasn't sure if things were different, but it felt like the repressive hostility was stronger than before, maybe it was just contrast from being without it.

One of the Slytherin boys stopped her from passing in the hall and to Hermione's utter revolt, he came onto her. She slapped him and forced her way past.

Things didn't get better at Hogwarts either. The boys were much more aggressive, leering at her, making suggestive remarks and suggestions.

Something had happened. He had done something.

She wasn't sure the first few days, but it continued and started getting worse. They were saying things to her in class and in the halls. She was hiding in the library more than ever, although she had retreated back into the restricted section, where few students had access.

Late one evening, she was making her way back to the common room after the library closed, when Blaise Zabini came up behind her. She couldn't help but feel anxious being alone in a hallway with one of the Slytherin boys.

"Hey, mudblood." He said playfully.

Hermione ignored him and kept walking.

"Hey." He said in a stronger tone. "I'm talking to you."

"Piss off." She said and quickened her step.

"No need to be rude." He continued and was right behind her to her distress.

He grabbed her by the waist and Hermione let out a yelp in shock.

"Let go of me."

"Oh come on." He said and walked her back into the wall. "See I know what you like. You like a bit of pureblood... attention."

Her wand was in her bag and she couldn't reach it as he was now pressing her into the wall with his body. Hermione wanted to retch and his breath on her face was making her nauseous. He put his hand under her skirt and stroked her thigh.

"Get away from me." She yelled.

"No need to be like that." He laughed.

"You heard her. Get away from her!" She heard to her left. It was Ron holding his wand straight at Zabini's chest.

"Just having a bit of fun." Zabini said and backed away with his hands up. He was still laughing as he made his way around the corner keeping an eye on Ron's wand.

"Thanks." Hermione said, fighting back the tears.

"That was bang out of order." Ron said. "You should report that."

Hermione could only nod.

"They're behaving completely inappropriately." He continued as if he was trying to convince her.

"It's gotten a lot worse since Christmas." She added trying to distract herself from the horrible feelings whirling inside her. "I know I brought this on myself for being so utterly stupid, but..."

“Doesn’t mean you should be attacked in the halls.”

“I was hoping it would have died down by now, but its just getting worse.”

“I’ll walk you back. I’m not sure what is going on, but they’re behaving atrociously. I never thought they would go this far though.” He rabbled on.

Hermione really appreciated having someone to walk with because she was not keen on spending anymore time in the halls on her own.

She was still in desperate need of a cry and it was only being compacted by the fact that Ron had come to her rescue. They might not be the best of friends anymore, but it was nice to know that he would still be come through if she was in real trouble.

In fact, both Harry and Ron were there the next morning, ready to walk her down to breakfast. They did their best to walk her to class when they could too. They seemed to have agreed amongst themselves that someone would come collect her up from the library in the evenings.

“What is going on?” Ginny asked as she came to get her from the library at closing time.

“I don’t know.” Hermione said. “Its something Draco has done.”

“You have to report it.”

“I’ve thought about it, but there is nothing to report. They haven’t actually done anything. Even Blaise, other than get a bit close, he didn’t actually do anything. Nothing that you can conclusively report.” Hermione said. “It must be his doing. It wasn’t like this before.”

Hermione felt like a twit, cowering from being harassed by Slytherins. Really, enough was enough. She wasn’t some defenceless girl who needs people to protect her. She would address this tomorrow, or else she would start hexing Slytherins in the hallways.

Although it help nice that her people were finally supporting her again.

The next day, she tracked Draco down coming out of the Slytherin common room.

“Call off your boys, Malfoy.” She said as she stood in his way, “or I won’t be responsible for what I do to them.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.” He said sounding bored.

“I mean it.”

“I can’t control what other people do.”

Hermione stared at him for a while. Anger boiling in her veins.

“So that is it? You won’t do anything about it.” She stated more than asked.

He shrugged his shoulders and looked down his nose at her.

“You’re a fucking waste of space, you know that.” She said and turned away.

“You don’t belong here.” He called after her.

“Get a new line, Malfoy. Your problem is that you can never come up with anything new. Its the same old line you’ve used for seven years now and it hasn’t gotten you anywhere. In fact, it almost got you in prison. Shame that, because the world would have been a better place if you were segregated from it.”

“You’re the one who needs to be segregated from it.” He yelled following her down the hall. “Your kind don’t belong here. Can’t you get that you’re not wanted here. How much will it take to convince you?”

“Whatever, Malfoy. I am just not interested in your bullshit rhetoric.” She said and walked on.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13

Whatever was going on didn't seem to diminish over the few days. There weren't any more 'attacks' because she was never really alone anymore. The girls were nasty and the boys were disgusting.

Hermione skipped the Hogsmead weekend because it just left her too open to the Slytherins' tender mercies.

She was getting sick and tired of reading the Daily Prophet as well. Lucius Malfoy had been re-instated in his position at the Ministry as well as his position on the Board of Governors for the school. It had only been a matter of months since his trial for subversive behaviour and being a Death Eater. The speed at which he had been welcomed back into wizarding society made her feel sick. What made it worse was that most of the senior staff at the Ministry had been removed or left because of the war, which left Lucius Malfoy more powerful than ever. There weren't many people with the clout to oppose him now.

It really was shaking her confidence in everything that was right and good in the world. She had been so completely confident that everything good and proper would prevail, but it was all just sliding backwards. The Slytherins were worse than ever, although that could be specifically targeting her.

Professor McGonagall, as much as Hermione adored her, just didn't have the diplomatic skill of Dumbledore. The school was a bit of a mess, with teachers trying to settle into new positions and new structures. The utter mess of the year before still needed to be cleaned of the impact of the deranged stewards of the previous year.

Hermione suffered through another week of harassment before she was called to the Head Mistress' office.

"I hear from the staff that this is proving to be a difficult year, particularly for yourself." Professor McGonagall started. "It would appear that you are a target for ire from certain factions."

"It is originating from a specific place." Hermione said.

Professor McGonagall seemed to be considering her words. Hermione was absolutely certain that the teachers would have heard about her 'relationship' with Draco Malfoy.

"If you give me something concrete in terms of inappropriate behaviour, I may be able to act on it. I am afraid," she continued softly, "that it needs to be a claim with substance."

Hermione knew that Lucius' reinstated position on the Board would probably mean more damage being done to the claiming parties unless the claim would be beyond a shadow of a doubt. She also knew that other than calling her Mudblood, Draco hadn't actually done anything. It had been everyone else and none of them, on their own, had done anything

sufficiently horrible to warrant anything beyond a detention. And somehow, she didn't think detentions would have the least bit of impact.

"Another option," Professor McGonagall continued, "would be to leave and finish your studies on your own. You are advanced enough, and disciplined enough, to complete the year away from the school. You would have to come back for the NEWT exam, of course."

Hermione mulled over the idea. On one hand, Hermione bristled at the thought of leaving as it felt like giving in. On the other hand, she wasn't enjoying herself in the least bit and staying would mean the continuation of a year that had in most respects been downright awful.

"There are no advantages to you for staying, provided you complete your NEWTs." McGonagall said.

Except to my pride, Hermione told herself. Was her pride worth another five months of hell and misery? If her friends were with her, she could handle it without batting an eyelid. They were back, but it wasn't quite the same and it was hard to just forgive, let alone forget that they deserted her.

"It might be best." She conceded.

"Think it over for a few days." The Professor said. "If you decide to go ahead, the resources of the library and your Professors are at your disposal by owl."

Hermione spent the next few days thinking about the idea of spending the rest of the year at home. She would miss out on the Slytherins harassing her, Draco's killing looks, watching Harry and Ron in their complete absorption in their girlfriends' lives, and the general unpleasantness of the post war wizard world. Other than wanting to stick it to Draco, there wasn't much reason for staying and every reason for leaving. She struggled with justifying her delight at rubbing Draco the wrong way as a good enough excuse to stay.

Seeing Blaise blowing her an exaggerated kiss as she walked past him in the crowded hall the next day, pretty much made up her mind. There was nothing here for her anymore.

She told her friends that evening as they were sitting in the common room. Lavender being there as well, which unfortunately meant the whole school would know by morning. Harry seemed to struggle with her decision the most, but try as he might, he couldn't really come up with any reasons to stay. They all seemed to reach a quiet mutual understanding that it was all for the best, even though it would represent a permanent end to the life they had lead for the last seven years.

They weren't children anymore and it was starting to show. Even without her fiasco with that certain prominent member of the other half of society, they had all been drifting apart even before that.

Hermione spent the next day packing. She did the rounds and said goodbye to her teachers and to her house mates. She was going to access the floo network at Hogsmead and travel to the Leaky Cauldron before taking the tube to her parents' house.

Harry, Ron, George, Neville and Ginny all got permission to walk her to Hogsmead and they'd leave just after lunch on Saturday. Lunch was a quiet affair, with attempts at joviality that was falling a bit flat. Hermione expressly ignored Draco. This was for moving on, so she

would not get drawn back there again. No more Draco Malfoy. On an even brighter note, no more nasty Slytherins at all. Well almost, she'd be back for NEWTS in a few months time, so it couldn't be a perfectly clean getaway.

Lunch was over and it was time to go. Hermione shrunk her trunk and stuck it in her backpack. They walked through the courtyard towards the Hogsmead path. When they got away from the castle, Hermione turned around and said goodbye to the castle that had been her home for a good part of her life. She'd loved it here. Loved the castle, the stones, the amazing things she had seen and learned here.

She was distracted by a spot of black in the Astronomy tower. She knew that spot and the blond crop on top of it. Damn him for imposing on this moment, she thought. Doesn't matter, she told herself as she turned her back on it all.

"I can't believe you're going." Ginny said. "I can't believe we are all going to be going in a couple of months. That's it, its over. We're officially grown up."

"I don't know." Ron said. "Maybe that we fought a war, pushed us into the grown up world already. I can't wait to leave."

Hermione didn't know what perverse impulse made them all laugh, but it turned into a general belly laugh. Even George laughed and it must have been one of the first real laughs he'd had in quite a while. It felt like it had been years since they laughed properly.

The snow crunched under their feet as they walked.

"Why don't you stay in my apartment?" Harry offered. "It's just sitting there. You should use it."

"But you will need it."

"Not for a few months yet. You can find your own place by then."

Hermione hadn't even considered it. She had assumed she would go home to her parents, but the idea of having her own space was appealing.

"Here, take the keys. Even if you decide not to, its there if you want to spend some time there."

"Thanks, Harry." She said and took the keys. She hadn't actually thought about what she was going to do, it had all been about leaving. Maybe she should get a job. That sounded awfully adult.

After the hugs, kisses, and promises to write, Hermione swore that she would see them soon enough when NEWTs were on. Then it was time to go and Hermione stepped into the fireplace and stepped out at the Leaky Cauldron. A few more steps and a nod to the barkeep and she was back in the muggle world. The hustle and bustle of muggle London was a shock compared to the sedate pace of Hogwarts life.

She had to go see her parents, even though staying at Harry's apartment in Diagon Alley sounded more appealing by the minute.

She arrived at Harry's apartment later that evening. It was freezing from lack of use, but it only took half an hour for the roaring fire to heat up the small apartment. The feeling of

freedom was palpable. Tomorrow she would go shopping, buy all the stuff she needed for starting her adult life. The cupboards were completely bare. The bathroom was also sparse, but she drew a hot bath all the same and soaked for a good hour.

Tomorrow, the rest of her life would officially start.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14

Hermione got a job in a small cafe in Diagon Alley. The pay was pitiful, but it was a nice environment and it was much better than sitting in the apartment all day. Both Harry and Ginny were true to their word and wrote, sometimes together, which was sickeningly cute. She did look forwards to the news from Hogwarts. Things had died down after she left, apparently. A Hufflepuff girl had gotten pregnant and that was the only real news.

The first week away was tough. It was really nice to be away from the harassment, even though she was lonely with all her friends so far away. But it got easier as she settled in, started setting down routines. She could visit her parents, and she went for a drink with Seamus when she ran into him. He wasn't around much as he was living back in Ireland. She even had dinner with Bill and Fleur.

The customers at the cafe were nice. Usually older shoppers who tended to need a break from shopping. She got to know most of them by name. Occasionally different types of people came in, sometimes the odd person who had graduated ahead of her.

She spent a great deal of time browsing Flourish and Botts, to the point where she would get excited on publishing day when the new titles came out.

One day, she literally bumped into a guy when entering the store. It was Gregory Dalsmith. He had been a sandy blond boy who had graduated a few years ahead. A rawenclaw. The setting sun just made him glow golden as she looked up to see who she had just bounced off. The sight took her breath away and to her chagrin made her a bit giggly. He smiled when he saw her and she was shocked when he remembered her name.

She had a very pleasant conversation with him as they stood there holding up the traffic. To her complete surprise, he seemed to want to speak to her because they talked for a whole ten minutes, ignoring the dirty looks of the shoppers trying to squeeze past them.

In the end, he invited her to a party and she accepted. She said goodbye with a smile and couldn't let it go the whole way home. He was astonishingly cute and he seemed a bit interested in her for some astounding reason.

Hermione looked forward to the party the whole week. It had been a really long time since she had been nervous for a good reason. She did her best to look good and she scrubbed up fairly well.

The party was a Rawenclaw party. She knew of a few people there, not well, but acquainted. She wondered how different her life would have been if she had been placed in Rawenclaw. She'd never have been friends with Harry and Ron, and she probably wouldn't have been the continual focus of Draco's persecution to the same degree.

Greg was a pureblood from a fairly old family. He had a sister, which was unusual in a pureblood family, where the Weasleys' fruitfulness were an exception to the rule. But he was

really nice, with a smile that made her stomach tingle.

He even took her home afterwards and gave her a small peck. She'd never been escorted home before. These were not the kind of manners she was used to. Life was very exciting for Hermione Granger.

He came and visited her in the cafe a couple of weeks later and ended up staying till closing, but it wasn't until a couple of weeks later that he took her out. They went to one of the small restaurants, then spent an hour at the pub after talking about everything and anything.

Before she knew it, she pretty much had a boyfriend. They went out on the weekends and before long spend a good hour at the end kissing on her doorstep. Hermione was utterly intent of taking it slow. She was not going to make the mistake she did before, when she let her hormones run with it. That had led her to sleep with Draco Malfoy. Anger still seared through her whenever she thought of him and she expressly forbid herself from doing so. But it snuck in at least once a day. Sometimes five.

Come April, Greg and Hermione were an item. They went everywhere together and lately she had asked him to come inside when he took her back to her apartment. It had been a bit nervous at first, but it wasn't long before it was really comfortable. He had a lovely body and his kisses gave her goosebumps all over. The sex was nice and it made Hermione feel safe and sexy. There wasn't the feel of needing to consume and being consumed that it with... you know, him, but it was lovely.

She had found the nice, respectful, reliable boy slash man she had always wanted. He had just introduced her to his parents and they were a little reserved. She recognised that she was not the ultimate match pureblood parents wanted for their child, but they weren't devastated. Not like they were anything near considering any permanent match, but all the same.

Before she knew it, Harry was back. His arrival at the apartment was a shock to Hermione. She had noticed that there had been few letters from Hogwarts recently, but she'd been too distracted to worry about it.

"Why are you here?" Hermione asked. "You shouldn't be here for another two weeks."

"What a welcome." Harry said. "They needed some extra time to repair the castle so they ended school early. Have you forgotten I was coming?"

"What do you mean two weeks early?" Hermione said feeling fear and adrenalin running through her. "What about Newts?"

Harry looked at her funnily. "They've already been."

Hermione felt ready to faint. She had missed Newts, how had this happened. "What?"

"We already sat them." Harry said, looking at her like she'd lost her mind.

Thoughts were swimming around Hermione's mind.

"You know this." Harry said. "I told you, McGonagall told you. You said you weren't going to sit them."

“No I didn’t.” Hermione said raising her voice. “Of course I was going to sit them. What do you mean I told you I wasn’t going to sit them?”

“You wrote to both me and Professor McGonagall saying that you weren’t going to sit them because you had to deal with some family issues.”

Hermione could only stare at Harry in disbelief. “What family issues? But I can’t get a job at the Ministry unless I have my Newts.”

“You wrote me a letter.”

“I haven’t written to you since March.”

“I got a letter from you three weeks ago.”

“I even wrote you back to ask if you were sure and if there is anything I could do to help.”

Hermione only shook her head.

“I have to see Professor McGonagall.” She said and apparated to Hogsmead.

The trek up to Hogwarts was fraught with worry for Hermione. Missing Newts was devastating. It would mean that she didn’t graduate and that she couldn’t get a real job. It would shunt her career before it even got started.

McGonagall confirmed that she missed Newts and that she had written and said she couldn’t make it. There was no way she could remedy it, but she could sit them next year. Hermione cried a bit in the hallway, but at least not all was lost. She could sit them next year, so it was just a year’s hiccup in her plan.

When that was settled, she turned her mind to how this happened. Letter she never wrote and more she never read. She hadn’t been that distracted. Someone had intercepted her mail and made her miss the Newts; the only thing of crucial importance in her life. She didn’t think any of her friends would play a joke like this. It was too bad a taste for Fred, even though he’d been acting weird. This was done by someone who wanted to hurt her and she only knew one of those.

Granted there were lots of people who wanted to see her brought down a peg or two, but she only knew one that would act on it. Mother effin bastard, she swore over and over. Luckily there weren’t anyone around in the hallways to hear her.

She stayed at Harry’s apartment for a few days and thought over every revenge scenario she could think of inflicting on Draco Malfoy. The apartment was really too small for a couple and a third wheel, particularly as Harry and Ginny were all over each other. They also announced their engagement one night at the Burrows. Hermione was really glad for them, not that it had been a surprise by any stretch of the imagination. The engagement did make Mrs. Weasley a little more lenient on letting Ginny stay with Harry, which made nights much more uncomfortable for Hermione in the small apartment.

Thinking of revenge scenarios when people were noisily having sex in the room next door just wasn’t working right. Hermione moved back to her parent’s house the next day. It was strange being back in her childhood room. She didn’t feel like a child anymore, but she didn’t want to change it because it was so nostalgic.

Greg was a perfect distraction. He made her laugh and life was fun when she was with him. She even took him to the Burrows when Harry and Ginny got engaged. Ron wasn't happy about it, but he was a damned sight happier than her last choice.

Having the school out did send little shivers of anguish down her spine as some of her old classmates started to appear in Diagon Alley. Some even came into the cafe. Even some of the Slytherin's. They weren't downright harassing, but they made it known that working in a cafe was well beneath them. Actually she served quite a few of them.

At the end of the week, she was called over by the boss at the end of the shift.

"Miss Granger, we have had a few complaints about your service lately." She said in a colder voice than usual. "Some of the patrons have said that you were rude and untidy."

Hermione didn't know what they were referring to, she given exactly the same level of service as she had before.

"I am afraid we have to let you go." The cafe owner continued.

Hermione was stunned and shocked. She gathered her things and left the cafe. She'd never been fired before and she couldn't quite understand how that had happened. It wasn't until she'd walked down the Alley a bit that she had realised what had just happened. It was the Slytherins. They had complained and gotten her fired. She wanted to throw her bag and stomp her feet she was so angry. He had screwed her again.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15

Hermione wracked her brain thinking of a way to get back at Draco, but she hadn't managed to think of anything that made any sense. She had already told the world that he sucked in bed, so that one was already gone. There was the prejudice against muggleborns, which was obviously still alive and kicking, but now that his father was safe from further prosecution, he wouldn't really care, nor probably anyone else at this point. The problem that was he hadn't actually done anything, other than being a total arsehole, but that wasn't a surprise to anyone.

She had to concede that she was not as gifted in the art of underhanded persecution and character assassination as he was. He was a Slytherin after all, this is their strength and she was a babe in the woods compared to him.

Harry and Ron's only suggested recourse involved copious amounts of violence, which would just get her in trouble, giving Draco some true ammunition against her. Her mother's less than helpful comments were about forgetting all about it and getting on with important things. All those times she had lectured Harry and Ron about how he wasn't worth the effort, now she realised how completely annoying and unhelpful that was.

Being at home with her parents was alright. She would have liked to be on her own, but without a job, there wasn't much hope for independence. Greg, her now recognised boyfriend, was her saving grace and distraction. He made her forget about the less than stellar post school entrance into the world.

The number of engagements now that school was out was eye popping, every week there were announcements. Much too young as far as Hermione's family was concerned, but in the wizarding world, it was normal that people got engaged just out of school. Hermione ended up going to both the Gryffindor and the Ravenclaw engagement parties.

Luckily she hadn't seen hyde nor hair of Draco all summer. They obviously didn't travel in the same social circles and for that Hermione was eternally grateful. It did grate everytime she heard of someone getting a nice job at the Ministry or Gringotts, or St Mungos based on their good NEWT scores. Hermione couldn't even apply for them as NEWTS were a requirement. She did come across a filing job at the Ministry. It wasn't a great job, but it was a way in and it was the only thing going.

She spent an inordinate amount of time putting together her application, making sure it was perfect. Everyone kept on telling her that they would be mad not to give it to her, and after a week of waiting she was awarded with a letter saying she was being granted an interview. Greg took Hermione out to the pub to celebrate. She was really happy, even though the job was a bit lower than she had hoped, after a year, with her NEWTs completed, she could move onto anything she wanted.

Things were finally starting to go her way. With the new job, she could afford to move into a flat with some of the other girls and could start her life properly.

The interview was with a Mr. Heraldson, who was a thin middleaged clerk with severely thinning hair, who was the assistant manager in the filing department of General Records. He was responsible for a hall full of records, which he believed was the most vital part of the Ministry.

The interview seemed to go well and Hermione thought she answered all his questions well. Hermione had a pretty good feeling about it at the end of the interview and Mr. Heraldson was chatting about the latest developments in interdepartmental communications within the Ministry as he walked her out.

He brought her down the hall in the basement where the General Records department was located and shook her hand before leaving her to walk around the corner to the lifts.

Hermione felt someone walk behind her as she made to turn the corner, when she looked back, she was encountered by Draco standing a couple of meters away. He was looking down his nose at her and wasn't saying anything.

Hermione had not expected him and couldn't think of a reason for why he would be there. He certainly wasn't saying anything to her, just staring at her like she was dirt that was putting a bad taste in his mouth. Hermione was too shocked and confused to say anything. Not that she particularly wanted to deal with him. She had an impulse to rip into him, but her future potential boss was still walking down the hall.

"I told you that you don't belong here." He said slowly before displaying that horrible smirk that seemed to tell of him knowing something she didn't. He was smiling as he stepped backwards down the hall before turning and effortlessly running after Mr. Heraldson.

Hermione realised that Draco was going to intervene in her job interview. She wanted to yell after him, but what was she going to do? Plead with him not to? The thought occurred to her, but honestly she'd rather die. She could go after them and try to convince Mr. Heraldson that whatever Draco was telling him was untrue and that he was just a bitter ex trying to ruin things for her. That wouldn't look very dignified and it may even give credence to what he was accusing. Or she could hope that Draco's intentions were transparent and the pathetic nature of what he was doing would shine through. How could it not? What kind of person goes and interferes in someone else's job interview. Surely Mr. Heraldson would recognise what a jerk Draco is. She had done a good job in the interview and surely that will count for more than Draco's petty behaviour.

Hermione decided that dignity was the way to go and walked out of the Ministry with her head held high. Deep down she knew that Draco would do his very best to be convincing, but there was the hope that his status as a former Death Eater would count against him considering he is openly attacking a muggleborn.

The letter apologizing that the Ministry could not give her a position at the moment came the next morning. Hermione was bitterly disappointed, mostly because they couldn't see through Draco's persecution. This wasn't supposed to happen. Dumbledore always made sure that fairness prevailed in the end and at the moment it seemed that fairness was a state he had created rather than a commodity in the world. How can a world be right where someone like

Draco can ruin things for her? All her potential, skills and knowledge must count for more than Draco and the Slytherins' nasty influence. This gave a strong hit to her confidence that common sense will overcome.

Harry and Ron indulged in another bout of articulation of the horrible things they would do to him, which detailed everything the horrible hexes would inflict to him. Ginny was also for revenge, but Hermione wasn't sure. She wasn't actually angry with Draco as much as she was disappointed that the world put up with what he was doing.

George offered her a job on the stop in the Joke Shop. He would even reward her if she made the Slytherins complain. He managed to convince her that he was serious and she accepted. There wasn't anything else on the horizon at this point and it could be fun.

Hermione was pretty sure she couldn't compete with Draco on the horrendous shit of a human being scale and she was pretty certain that she didn't want to. In the scale of things, it didn't mean much, the Ministry job was a shit job that would bore Hermione to tears. He hadn't really damaged her, she still had a great boyfriend, more friends and support than he could comprehend. When it came down to it, he couldn't really touch the stuff that mattered.

She wanted him to know that he couldn't really get to her. Try as he might, he can't get to her. Maybe her mother was right in that being happy and content was the best form of revenge. Draco had reached the end of his influence. He would never be able to budge George and she was damned if she was going to fall apart over this. Stuff him the fucking bastard. She was going to get on with her life and he can run after her and try to ruin things for her if he wants. She is not going to care or waste her energy thinking about it. She's got a great boyfriend, a job he can't touch and friends who don't give a flippin hoot what he things or says.

Her determination did take the sting out of it and Hermione started at the Joke shop a couple of days later. It was complete chaos, but she enjoyed it far more than she would spending her days filing. Turns out the bastard did her a favour and if she ever saw his ugly face again she would let him know.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16

Even though Hermione was working full time in George's Joke shop, she decided to stay at home with her parents. It was nice and uneventful, and her parents never really placed any demands on her. Greg was making noises about living together, which wasn't really acceptable in the wizarding world if they weren't engaged. Although he was everything she wanted, she just wasn't sure about getting engaged. It was such a big step and she had just gotten started being an adult. She knew her parents were definitely against any such move. In fact, they wanted her to go to University. Muggle University.

Hermione suspected that her parents thought of the wizard world as a nice distraction when growing up like a specialist performing arts school, but in the end she had to get serious and join the real world, which in their view was the muggle world. They certainly didn't feel that working in a Joke Shop was a proper job. Neither was working in the Ministry, which to them had the same weight as working in the local council. Not exactly the high flying career they wanted for her.

Greg wasn't too concerned about her career. Secretly she suspected that he would expect, as most wizards did, that she'd stop working once she got married. She knew she would have to address that issue. She had learn that glossing over issues got you in trouble, like she had just glossed over Draco's fundamentalist pureblood beliefs, his general nastiness and the fact that they had been enemies for as long as they had known each other. A couple of months of canoodling in the tropical Caribbean didn't actually resolve any of those things. They had just taken a vacation from it.

She hadn't seen him for a few weeks since he'd ruined her chances at the Ministry filing job. She had a feeling that eventually he would turn up, hell bent on mischief. Or maybe he'd tired of it by now.

Ron and Lavender got engage and Hermione's immediate thought on the news was to stick her finger down her throat and gag, but she didn't considering she was standing next to Mrs. Weasley at the time. Although looking at George, he felt about the same way.

Things were ticking along nicely. Neville was starting his apprenticeship at Hogwarts. George was coming out of this little weirdness shell.

On the not so nice side, there was talk that Lucius Malfoy may be in a position to run for Minister of Magic in the next election. There were also discussions in the papers about requiring muggleborn children to participate in cultural education before gaining entrance to Hogwarts. The justification was that they would have a much easier time if they had a good understanding of the wizard culture. Some were even suggesting that muggleborn children should be placed with wizard families to ensure proper cultural assimilation, and to minimise the negative effect of unproductive ingress of muggle culture. It all left a bad taste in Hermione's mouth.

It just felt like this underhanded discrimination that was being made palatable by its veneer of well meaningness. The Weasleys' didn't immediately see anything wrong with it. It came across as well meaning, but the undercurrent was smacking of discrimination against muggleborns and anything muggle related. Harry could see how Hermione would bristle against it, but for himself, he would have loved being placed with a wizard family growing up. Harry's time in the muggle world hadn't left him with any particular fondness for it.

Hermione put her two cents in wherever she could, but she felt drained dealing with it. The ignorance and the thoughtless discrimination was pervasive and insidious, and she found that she was better off just ignoring it. It was true that some of the fight had gone out of her since the war, particularly as it seemed to have achieved very little in the way the wizarding world thought about things. The psycho was gone but the society that enabled him was still very much there.

Maybe dealing with screaming brats all day was draining her energy somewhat too. Sometimes she liked walking through Diagon Alley to the Leaky Cauldron with the intention of taking the tube home. She could just apparate, but the journey gave her time to reflect. It was starting to get colder and darker as she left the Joke Shop these days.

"So you're still here, Mudblood." She heard that familiar voice behind her.

Hermione did an exasperated drop of her head at the sound. Why did she have to deal with him. Didn't she have enough on her plate?

"What do you want Malfoy?" She whined without turning around. "Seven fucking years you've been calling me mudblood, doesn't it ever get old?"

"It's what you are." He said as she turned to glare at him. It still surprised her how tall he was, standing there dressed in his typical expensive black suit. He actually looked bigger, she was pretty sure he'd filled out a bit over the year, since she had last seen him... in more comfortable circumstances.

Hermione gave an annoyed sigh and checked her watch. "Are you done?"

"Not fucking likely!" He responded.

"It's pathetic what you're doing."

"And what am I doing?" He said and was again look down his nose at her.

It was completely incomprehensible that she had those lips on just about every part of her body. She must have been out of her mind.

"Whatever Malfoy, I have to go." She said before giving him an annoyed look. She turned to leave.

"I have driven you out of this world. I drove you out of Hogwarts. I took your friends, your pathetic prospects and whatever future you saw fit to weddle yourself into." He said with obvious spite.

"I don't think so." She snapped back. "I still have my friends, a job, and a boyfriend I adore. You haven't achieved anything."

“Your glorious job working as a shop keep? I hope its all you ever dreamed of.” He said and Hermione knew that he was right. It wasn’t what she’d hoped. “And your friends, lets all forget how quickly they dumped you when it came down to it. They couldn’t wait to get out when the weather wasn’t so fair, could they?”

“Atleast I have friends.” She shot back and started to walk away. She was trying really hard to make sure he didn’t get a reaction out of her. Moving on, moving on, moving on she repeated to herself.

“If that’s what you call it.” He yelled after her, “I’m not going away Granger. Do I really need to show you that there’s no place in this world for you?”

“And yet, I’m still here. You’ve run out of things to do to me, so just leave me alone.”

“I’m just getting started. My father is going to be Minister, Granger. That is going to make things difficult for you to get anywhere.”

“Dream on ferret.”

Hermione ignored him as she walked towards the Leaky Cauldron. She was absolutely determined not to cry. Why could he always make her cry?

Hermione didn’t hear a peep out of Draco for a couple of months. She was pretty sure he would have done it if there was anything he could inflict on her. Greg knew about their past and the less than gentlemanly behaviour from Draco after. Her job was completely secure and her friends aren’t likely to be swayed by anything he says.

She was kind of looking over her shoulder for a while, but when nothing happened, she slowly settled down with a bit more confidence.

Harry and Ginny’s wedding was beautiful. Mrs. Weasley cried throughout. Greg seemed to enjoy it too, and he was starting to make noises that he’d like their relationship to be a bit more permanent. Hermione was a little bit weary, but Greg couldn’t understand her hesitance. It was what everyone did and he couldn’t see a reason for waiting.

It got to the point where he was starting to get a bit distressed by Hermione’s ongoing dismissal of the subject. The married state was obviously something he expected, and Hermione didn’t technically have anything against it. He would make a fantastic husband.

Although she could put him off for a while, the topic crept back in again and again. Eventually she agreed to talk about it and she spelled out clearly that she could not tolerate being a housewife. His protests that children would keep her occupied, led them into that discussion. The fact that Hermione was not ready for children and that was just that.

He eventually conceded and somehow Hermione ended up engaged. All her friends were happy for her, they felt he was perfect for her and she couldn’t find anything to disagree with.

Greg’s family put the engagement in the Daily Prophet, they were a bit miffed that they had to do it as it was customarily the duty of the bride’s family. The term ‘bride’ sat like a lump in her throat. She wasn’t one of those girls who had dreamt of the day since childhood. But she reassured herself that she was just having nerves. It was all going to be perfect.

The engagement party was being held the following week at the Godric’s Hollow Hall. All her Gryffindor friends and her new Ravenclaw friends were invited, along with family

members, which turned out to be most of the wizarding world on Greg's side. Sadly even Rita Skeeter, and Hermione couldn't persuade Greg to leave her out, she was his mother's sister after all.

Hermione bought a beautiful navy dress with sheer material covering the fitted top and A line skirt. She did feel beautiful in the shimmery dress. It made her feel sophisticated, like Grace Kelly. Looking good was the least she could do to convince Greg's family that maybe the match wasn't so terrible.

The party went well and the announcement was made before everyone sat down to dinner. Hermione was a bundle of nerves during the announcement, which was unexplainable as everyone knew exactly why they were there. Greg held her hand throughout the announcement. She started to relax as they sat down to the roast beef dinner.

A large bang made her look up from her plate and to her mortification, Draco was standing in the hall entrance. Her stomach churned over in apprehension. He didn't look drunk, which was something. Maybe he was here to wish her luck, but she doubted it. He was going to have a last shot. Call her a slut or whatever, just for the sake of ruining her day. She would have to engage some security for the wedding she decided. She heard Greg groan beside her.

"How cosy." Draco said loudly enough for everyone to here.

Hermione was shaking her head, appealing him to not do whatever he planned.

"The happy couple." He continued, while Greg stood up. "I won't say you're a lucky guy, because she's a fickle girl. Isn't that right, sweetheart?"

Hermione had enough and she stood up too, while Greg prepared to go intercept Draco.

"Get out of here, Malfoy." Ron warned from one of the tables.

"Because she'll leave you." Draco continued, "Just like she did after our honeymoon in Cuba. Isn't that right?" He said turning his attention to Hermione, who's jaw dropped along with everyone in the room.

"You're married!" Greg yelled.

"No." Hermione pleaded. "Greg. Its not true."

The rooms collective attention turned back to Draco who gave an expression like she was a naught child caught in a lie.

"You lied to me." Greg said and started to back away from him.

"He's lying Greg. You know he's trying to hurt me."

"No my love," Draco said with blatant spite, "I am trying to stop you from hurting other people."

Hermione moved towards Greg, but he put up his hands to stop her before turning his back and walking out the door.

The murmur in the hall grew deafening and Hermione could see Rita Skeeter dictating to her quill.

Draco gave her a victorious look and vilest sneer he had managed so far.

“Seems you’re not so secure after all.” He said quietly so only they could hear. Another glare and he turned to leave with the crowd.

“You bastard.” She shouted after him.

Only her friends were left in the deserted hall and Hermione couldn’t manage to keep her tears confined as they spilled down her cheeks. She’d never anticipated that he would go this far. This had to stop. She was going to find some way of hurting him for what he’s done to her.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17

"I swear I'll kill him." Hermione stated still staring at the empty hall.

"This is unbelievable, even for him." Ginny confirmed.

"I'll never understand what made you spend the summer with him, but not even you would be stupid enough to marry him." Ron piped in.

"Thanks Ron. That makes me feel so much better." Hermione bristled, although she wasn't certain whether she agreed with him or not. She hated being called stupid, particularly by Ron, but admitted there may be some justification.

"I have tried the high road." She said. "I was completely mature about it, but if he wants a fucking war, I'll give him one. I am going to make him cringe every time he hears the word mudblood."

"Let's go back to our place." Ginny said. "George has taken your parents home."

"How dare he!" Hermione continued, not really listening to the others.

Once back at Harry and Ginny's flat in Diagon Alley, Ginny made tea, but Hermione ended up with something a little stronger.

"I don't know Hermione." Ginny said. "This is getting serious."

"He's gone too far." Hermione said.

"I know he has, but with this he really has cut off his face to spite his nose."

"Are you saying being married to me is like cutting off your face?"

"I'm just saying it's a pretty drastic move on his part, pretty drastic for the purpose of annoying your ex. You broke up because he wanted to keep the relationship silent, now he's gone and publically linked you two out of spite. That's a bit on the crazy side."

"I don't care why he is going it, I am going to make him regret it." Hermione countered, still seething with anger.

"Ginny is right." Harry said. "This could be mental stalker territory. Those pureblood families have inbred themselves into barking lunacy and the Malfoys are no exception."

"You need to report this. Let the authorities deal with it in case it turns into one of those 'I'll cut you into pieces and wear you as a hat' thing."

"Please." Hermione puffed indignantly. "It's Malfoy. He's just a brat who can't take not getting his way."

"Or the psycho who can't take it when he doesn't get what he wants." Ginny continued. "This just leaves a bad taste in my mouth. It is well beyond any level I thought he'd go to."

“He just needs to be brought down a dozen pegs or so.” Hermione said. “I’m not going to stand idly by and let him ruin my life. I don’t care how loony he is, he needs to learn that there are consequences to messing with people.”

Hermione had enough listening to them, so she apparated home. She was way too angry to listen. She was sick and tired of being pushed around by him. Being mature about it had obviously had no impact what so ever. So if dignity wouldn’t make him stop, she would find a way to make him.

The media was in uproar. The Ravenclaws confirmed that they had always thought there was something suspect about her. Meanwhile such a juicy story had justified Rita Skeeter going all the way to Cuba, where funnily, she had found a whole bunch of muggles who had confirmed that the young English couple had indeed been on their honeymoon. Hermione was pretty sure who had sent her in that direction.

Ginny came by the next evening for a chat, after Hermione had spent the whole day devising revenge schemes. Ginny was still against any scheme, which to Hermione was odd, because her fiery temper usually made her for such things.

“You can deny the marriage until the cows come home. I think it is going to take something more drastic.” Ginny said. “People genuinely believe it. Greg certainly does.”

“Have you seen him?” Hermione asked.

“Harry went to see him. He was having second thoughts about leaving you behind.”

“No kidding?” Hermione said a bit distantly.

“But then he read what that Skeeter woman said about it being confirmed.”

“That’s not confirmation!” Hermione said. “He could have paid them to say that.”

“Did he?”

“No.” Hermione admitted. “He made everyone believe we were on our honeymoon so they wouldn’t give us flack for staying in the apartment on our own.”

“And you thought that was a good idea?” Ginny pressed.

“Well, I certainly didn’t foresee this. It seemed harmless. This is completely untenable. He can’t just do what he wants.”

“I’m not sure you should get into it with him, Hermione. Maybe its better to deal with this officially, by proving that he is lying. Everyone will know in the end.”

“How do you prove a negative? There is no marriage certificate, but its not like anyone is worried over such minor details.” Hermione said.

“Malfoys have a lot to lose by being married.” Ginny said. “Maybe you should start going to Gringott’s and withdrawing large sums of Malfoy money. That will get the issue sorted quick smart.”

The thought made them both laugh. “Maybe I should demand a divorce. Then when he’d have to settle a significant sum of money on me, he will font up with the truth.”

“You can’t demand a divorce. This isn’t the muggle world, its a bit more traditional here, he has to grant you a divorce.”

“That’s barbaric.”

“Its the law here.” Ginny said. “So unless you can prove the marriage is bogus, you’re stuck with him. Maybe a slander case of some kind.”

Hermione let the conversation flow, but in reality, she had a much better plan. One that would actually inflict some embarrassment, and maybe even some social damage. Knowing the Malfoys, if they went to court, everything would disappear nice and quietly. She would get money out of it, but she wasn’t interested in his money, she wanted pain.

Hermione took a couple of days planning her revenge. She planned it down to the minute. The media was still obsessed with this supposed secret marriage between a Death Eater, and not just any Death Eater, a Malfoy and a Mudblood.

Lucius Malfoy had confirmed that he was unaware of the marriage, but would not go so far as to comment on what he thought of it publically. Hermione was sure that Draco was probably getting strips ripped off him at home. Judging from his reluctance to have anyone know of the relationship to begin with, he was probably facing some severe flack, unless he had somehow managed to get his parents to go along with it, which she doubted. What he was doing didn’t make sense, and maybe Ginny had a point to be weary, but Hermione was too angry and upset to care. She needed to get back at him, for her own sanity, not to mention self-respect.

Hermione managed to keep her cool all morning on revenge day. She needed an unwitting accomplice and had picked Parvati to fulfil that function. She had asked Parvati to meet her at the Blind Goat pub, which was incidentally just down the road from the Daily Prophet offices.

Parvati was a little surprised that Hermione had asked her to this strange pub, considering how public it was. Parvati was trying to query her about Malfoy, but Hermione was putting her off until her true quarry had arrived. A Mr. Stephen Helmsley, a junior editor at the Daily Prophet, who took his lunch in the seat directly behind Hermione’s back every day for lunch.

All of a sudden, Hermione got really upset.

“I really loved him.” She sobbed. “But I had to leave, he just gets so angry and he…”

The concern in Parvati’s eyes made her feel a bit guilty, but this was necessary. Parvati took her hand and squeezed it.

“I tried so hard, but he just wouldn’t stop.” Hermione whispered loudly interrupted by great big heaving sobs. “He beats me.”

Parvati’s shock was audible and Hermione could hear Stephen Helmsley scramble through his bag for his quill.

“I begged him to stop, but it just keeps doing it. In the end, I had to flee or he would end up going too far.”

“Oh sweet fates, you poor thing. He is such an utter bastard.” Parvati said. “You can’t go back.”

Stephen Helmsley scrambled out of his chair and ran out of the pub.

Hermione wiped the tears of her cheeks and smiled. "I'm starving, I think I'll have the Steak and Guinness pie. How about you, what are you having?"

Parvati was a little shocked by Hermione's speedy recovery, but obviously figured Hermione was putting on a brave face.

Hermione was again stung by a pang of guilt for deceiving her friend, but in this case the end forgives the means. She couldn't help a little pleased smile as Parvati studied the menu.

The next day, Hermione's reason for leaving her young marriage was plastered all over the front page of the Daily Prophet. Letter of support came flooding in, causing a bit of a traffic jam outside her window.

Even Greg turned up, ready to forgive her, but his stock had diminished pretty severely in her books. She told him how glad she was that he was ready to forgive her, but it would take much, much longer for her to forgive him. With that she kicked him out. Again another man who runs at the first sign of trouble. Who needs them. At least she had to give Draco credit for follow through.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18

Hermione stayed at home for a few days. The success of her revenge had done wonders for her confidence. She'd got him and got him good. The media was hounding her, luckily they weren't as forwards as the muggle media and they couldn't be seen hanging out outside of her parents' house in their muggle neighbourhood. But she knew that they would be on her the minute she stepped into the Leaky Cauldron.

On the third day she decided it was time to face the music. She wore large dark glasses and looked harassed as they forced her way through the throng of reporters. She did play it up a bit. She had to look pitiful because this was going right onto the front page of what was now the juiciest story in the wizarding world. There had not been a statement from the Malfoy household yet.

It warmed the cockles of her heart thinking about how they would be struggling to deal with the humiliation of it all. They really deserved it. It affected Lucius' path to the Minister of Magic position and Hermione was sure Draco was being lectured to death right that minute.

She also knew that there would be consequences, but now, luckily due to Lucius' political career, they had to be very careful how they handled it. And her.

Her friends were shocked. Ginny kept on kneading her fingers, which was really unlike her. Even Harry wasn't revelling in the joy of her revenge.

"Did he hit you?" Harry demanded as she walked through the door to his apartment.

"Like he could get away with that without being hexed into oblivion." She said but continued when her friends were still looking uncertain. "I made it up to get him back for what he did to me."

There was silence in the room.

"Come on, guys." Hermione said. "He was so asking for it."

"I know but what's the fallout going to be?" Harry asked.

"What more can we possibly do to each other?" Hermione questioned. "Now he knows that if he dishes out to me, he has to take some himself. The muggles call it mutual deterrence. It keeps the balance when both parties know they can hurt each other."

"Yeah, but now you're his wife!" Ron said.

"Think of it as a game of chicken." Hermione responded. "Me being married to a pureblood means nothing to me or my friends and family. Him being married to a mudblood is a much bigger deal. He is going to have to give. He is going to have to undo this."

“He’s definitely done something to you.” Ron said and Hermione rolled her eyes. “You think like a Slytherin.”

“I just know my enemy.” She said.

“So this is going to have no consequences at all?”

“How can it? Weren’t not actually married remember. And it will be in his best interest, if not his father’s to acknowledge that fact as soon as humanly possible. I’m surprised they haven’t yet.”

“Maybe it would be less embarrassing to let it stand.” Ginny said.

“To the Death Eaters? I can’t see how.” Hermione responded.

“And what if he doesn’t?” Harry asked.

“Doesn’t what?” Hermione was confused.

“What if he doesn’t undo it? The marriage.”

“Why wouldn’t he? Being linked to me publically is paramount the worst thing that could happen to him.”

“But he set up the link. Are you just going to go on being married to him?”

“I’m not married to him. I don’t have to act like I am. If I want to date people, I can, if I want to get married, I can and there is nothing he can do about it.”

Hermione was to certain that Draco had to tuck his tail and back out of this, she hadn’t really planned on an eventuality where he didn’t. It was just a matter of time, she was certain.

The next day she returned to work at the Joke Shop. Reporters weren’t allowed in the store, which kept her relatively safe. Most had learnt that she wasn’t going to give them any more. Being the dignified injured party who did not wash her dirty linen in public. Or so she wanted it to look.

Hermione was completely shocked when one of the customers called her Mrs. Malfoy. At first she looked frantically around for Narcissa Malfoy until she realised that they were talking to her. She stared at them for a while, not sure what to do. In all her careful planning, she had not realised this small inconsequential fact. After standing there for a few seconds with a gaping mouth she took the customers money and handed the purchase over in a bag.

Her heart was still beating from the thought of Mrs. Malfoy, the real one, coming to the shop. She had to go out the back to take a bit of a breather. Being called Mrs. Malfoy had spooked her, but it was just temporary, part of the game.

Why hadn’t he publically undone this whole thing yet. None of the Malfoys would tolerate their prodigy being linked to a mudblood, so what were they waiting for?

Hermione scanned the papers every morning, but there was nothing. They must obviously be strategising still.

At the end of the day, Hermione walked home as she always did, down Diagon Alley to the Leaky Cauldron.

“Hello, wife.” She heard a spiteful voice to her left.

“Draco.” She said and turned to him. He stepped out of the dark side alley. She knew it had only been a matter of time before they would have a confrontation.

“Nice little trick that.” He said. “I was surprised. I would have thought something like that would have been beyond you.”

“I’m glad you liked it.”

“Getting all down and dirty, bit much for a prissy Gryffindor. Almost got me hot.” He said, again cocking his head back in the way he did.

“You’re disgusting.”

“No you are.”

“Oh good comeback.” She said. “Pulling tactics out of the pre-school book of insults now. I know, why don’t you call me a mudblood. That should show me. Maybe I’ll even reward you with a bit of a bottom lip wobble.”

“Don’t get lippy.” He said.

Hermione just opened her mouth for another stinging reply when he hit her with a body binding hex. Her body fell back into the building behind her. She hadn’t that coming, he hadn’t even been holding his wand. He must have had it up his sleeve. Damn those seeker reflexes. This was not playing fair. Her arms and hands were stuck to her body, while her legs were similarly attached to each other. She tried to wiggle a bit, but the restraints held.

“Help me.” She called out. A couple up the road scurried away and another couple walked past without looking at them. Hermione was shocked that they would just ignore someone being attacked on the street.

“You’re wondering why no one is helping you?” Draco said with insincere concern.

Hermione gave him the dirtiest look she could manage. He stepped over and crouched down by her feet. She had an urge to kick him, but the restraints kept her still.

“You’re my wife remember.” He said. “That gives me certain privileges.”

“What you can just attack me in the street.”

“I can discipline you however I see fit.”

“That is completely repugnant.”

“It is. But it is already well known what kind of husband I am, so a bit of public discipline is not out of order.”

“Please tell me that in that deluded numbskull of yours, you actually can recall that we’re not actually married.” Hermione spat.

“That doesn’t seem to have made a damned bit of difference, now has it. I admit, it has been a bit trying...”

“I bet you got your arse handed to you.” Hermione laughed.

“...but I will persevere.” He said slowly like he was talking to a child. “And now, on to the discipline part.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” Hermione yelled.

“And here I think we settled what I would dare.” He said pointedly. “I think its time for you to see your husband’s domain.”

“Don’t you touch me Malfoy. I swear I will kill you.” Hermione yelled from her panicked and disabled position, knowing full well there was nothing she could do at the moment.

A whoosh and a twack, and Malfoy was unconscious on the ground.

“Don’t you fucking touch her!” Ron yelled. Relief flooded through Hermione’s body. Harry was actually holding him back as he tried to kick the unconscious Malfoy. When Ron had been sufficiently been pushed away, Harry undid Hermione’s body bind. Harry continued to stand between Ron and Draco’s body until Ron calmed down.

Draco was bleeding from the nose. It had been a good punch.

“Merlin that felt good.” Ron said shaking his hand. “Why didn’t I do that ages ago?”

“I told you it was a great feeling.” Hermione said laughing thinking of the time in third year when she’d had the same experience. Her body was still buzzing with adrenalin and whatever was causing the giddy relief that was flowing through her brain at the moment.

“What should we do with him?” Harry said.

“Just leave him.” Hermione said.

“Hopefully he will freeze to death.” Ron said. “Should we take his wand?”

“Do you want to get a visit from Lucius Malfoy?” Harry asked.

“Good point.” Ron said. “I guess we are leaving the bastard. Unless you have something better in mind.” He asked Hermione.

“Like what?” She asked disbelievingly. “Should I take him back and torture him?”

“Could be fun. Its not like he doesn’t deserve it, attacking you on the street.”

“Lets just go.” Hermione said. They walked away, but Hermione ran back and knocked on one of the doors before running off again. She wasn’t sure why she had just made sure that he was found before long. She could have just left him. It was Diagon Alley and the possibility of him not being found before some serious hypothermia set in was low. A bit of frost bite would probably do him good.

“At what point should I regale you with my ’I told you so’s.” Harry said.

“Could you hang on till tomorrow?”

Chapter 19

Chapter 19

Hermione apparated to work the next day. Her parents hated people appearing and disappearing in front of them, but under the circumstances, their annoyance gave way to larger concerns.

She still couldn't believe he had attacked her. She dreaded to think about what he would have done if Harry and Ron hadn't come to her rescue. But as the store got busy, she dismissed it from her mind. Actually that's not true, it crept in as soon as she wasn't doing anything. She made sure she wasn't subjected to those conditions as much as she could.

Tension was building as the day was drawing to a close. And she hated it. She was not going to be told what to do by a stupid ferret. With all the confidence she could muster, she decided that she was not going to change her ways. She was going to walk down Diagon Alley to Harry and Ginny's apartment. She kept a firm grip on her wand the entire way, but luckily there wasn't any signs of Draco or any other Slytherins.

Ron was on her the minute she got in the door.

"You have to do something about this." Ron said. "He can't do this."

"Apparently he can." Hermione said. "Everyone thinks were married, they will let him do anything he wants. People were walking past and they didn't do anything."

"But you're not married."

"I never thought he would go this far." Hermione said, more to herself. "This is serious Ron, he attacked me."

"I know, but he didn't, we were there to protect you."

"He said he wanted to drive me out of this world." Hermione said, looking out the window at the world he was referring to. "Maybe I should go."

"That would be letting him win."

"I don't care! I don't want to play anymore, not if I am going to get attacked in the process. Winning against Draco is not worth getting raped or beaten, or whatever else he's decided in his demented little mind."

"Come on Hermione, I'm sure its not that bad. He was just trying to scare you." Ron said. "You have to report this. He can't get away with this. If you report it, he will be forced to stop. You can't let him spook you like this."

"No Ron." Ginny intervened. "I think Hermione is right. There is something seriously off kilter with this. This is more than just a bit of teasing."

"I know it is, but you can't just walk away. You can't let him win."

“Watch me.” Hermione said feeling angry at being pushed. “It was mere chance that you and Harry were there yesterday.”

“But we will be and you will be on guard next time.”

“I don’t want a next time. I am sick and tired of fighting. This war is supposed to be over now. I have had enough of fighting.”

“So what are you going to do?” Ginny questioned.

“I am going to go for a while.” Hermione stated.

“Just leave us?” Ron said with more concern than when she left their relationship.

“I can come visit here, but just stay out of the public for a while. Until Malfoy fixates on someone else. I’ll go away for a while, come back and do my NEWTs then go from there. Its not like I am achieving anything working in the joke shop anyway.”

“So what are you going to do?” Harry said, voicing in for the first time.

“I don’t know. Maybe go to University, get an Internship somewhere. My grandmother has offered to get me an internship at one of the media companies. That would be fascinating. Or I could go travelling again, properly this time.” Hermione was getting into the swing of things and the light feeling that came over her as she talked about the exciting opportunities in the muggle world didn’t go unnoticed by her or anyone else.

Actually it was like a great weight coming off. Her time in the wizard world had always meant swimming against the current with pure grit making her move forwards against prejudice, small minded-ness and oppressive ignorance. There was no great horrible war looming, the constant obsession with her blood status and it felt really good.

“Just for a while.” Ginny said pointedly. “You belong here.”

“Uh huh.” Hermione confirmed, but she wasn’t sure how strongly she was going to feel about that later. The muggle world was like a shiny new life where everything was exciting, new and possible. Hermione knew that none of them would understand that. She was old enough to suspect that the wizard world may seem like a dark hole in comparison, but she wasn’t sure. Maybe she would miss it terribly. She had after all missed her friends something shocking when she was away during the latter part of seventh year.

Hermione enrolled in University a few days later. She was going to study French Literature. It sounded interesting and she probably wasn’t going to stay around too long, so why not study something interesting.

She was really excited about starting anew. She decided to dig through some of the stacks of books in her bookshelf to extract a couple of favourite French books she’d read a few summers back while on vacation with her parents. As she riffled through one of the stacks she came across her sketching book. The one she’d had with her in Cuba. It seemed to burn her fingers, but she couldn’t take her eyes off it. The bland yellow cover of the booklet seemed to tease her, but her brain was screaming at her to put it back.

She slowly leafed through the pages full of Cuban scenery. They weren’t really the sketchings she was interested in. Towards the second half of the book were the drawings of

Draco. One of him fishing on the shore. One of him smiling. Several of him sleeping and naked.

She studied the pictures for longer than she'd care to admit, but closed the booklet quickly as she started to tear up. She had been so happy then, so content, living a lie.

She hated the fact that there was a part of her that wished that Harry and Ron had not been there in the alley. A part of her that loved his dedication, the willingness for intensity and the thrill of the chase. That same part that adored his Slytherin qualities, the determination, the resourcefulness and relentless pursuit of what they want. Even vengeance.

The fact was that she still wanted to play and that scared her more than anything. It was what made her back away. What kind of girl wants to be attacked on the street? And even though she had acknowledge that there is a part of her that revels in him and his constant piercing attention, there is a major part of her than cannot abide by it. It was not who she was raised to be. You did not allow any kind of aggression or any liberties for that matter. Boys should ask your permission before they kiss you. Ron had, so had Greg for that matter. So why had she on one level been relieved then those relationships failed?

She wiped whatever stupid moisture had built up in her eyes, put away the sketch booklet somewhere out of sight and dismissed those stupid thoughts from her head. She was going to have a fantastic Christmas and she wasn't going to think of him once.

Her university was chaotic. There were 10,000 students and she swore every single one of them were there that day. There was a sea of people her age, chatting, laughing, listening to their MP3 players or engrossed in their computer screens. There were cute guys, and cuter guys, then absolutely gorgeous guys. Ginny would never believe her.

The classes were interesting. There was no such thing as blood status and no one looked down on her. She could get used to this.

To her surprise, her friends were ambivalent about hearing of her new experiences. With a non-committed nod and a 'how interesting', the topics seemed to gear back towards quidditch at the soonest possible opportunity.

She had spent every Friday night at Harry's apartment and it had been great to see everyone. Both Harry and Ron were working at the Ministry and Ginny was trying out for one of the professional quidditch teams. Lavender had opened a shop selling beauty products. Luna was working with her.

Eventually activities were encroaching on their Friday nights together, Ministry events and the such. The Friday nights together became more rare and Hermione discovered that living in two worlds wasn't really working. Straddling the two worlds seemed to disable either of them from working properly for her. Eventually she was being invited out more by her new muggle friends. She could feel herself gliding out of the wizard world more and more. What was worse was that she didn't really have a reason to fight it. She would take her NEWTs at the end of the year, but beyond that she didn't really have any plans.

And then one day after one of her tutorials, she met Matt. He was cute and funny, and smart. He was two years older and planned to be a journalist. They walked to the tube station together and agreed to meet up for a coffee the next day. He was talking about going skiing in Norway the next week.

As per usual, the house was empty when she got home. Her parents usually didn't get home until later in the evening. But she got a funny feeling as she walked through the house. There wasn't anyone there and there weren't any signs that anyone had been. But something was off. She chided herself for being silly until she saw a single blond hair on the matt on her floor. It had partially fallen on the dark part of her Garfield matt, otherwise she would never had seen it. She got that ridiculous matt when she was seven and hadn't had the heart to throw it out. Besides, Crookshanks had loved it.

He'd been in her house. She couldn't see anything disturbed. She scanned the entire house for any hidden magic, but found nothing. There weren't any traps laid for her or her parents. There were no messages, or any sign that he wanted her to know he'd been there. She had vacuumed a few days ago, so the hair was definitely a recent addition.

She didn't turn the lights on until her parents got home. She wasn't sure why. Actually, she knew. If the lights are on, she could be seen from the outside. Not that she thought he's be watching her, but then again she'd never anticipated that he be in her house.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20

Hermione kept her eyes out for Draco, but there wasn't a sign of him. She had charmed her house to show when someone had entered it while they were away, but no one had disturbed it. The worst was that she thought about him incessantly. She wondered why he was there. He couldn't have planned on her finding that hair. As a tool for torture, this was pretty good, but he would have made more of an effort to know he had invaded her sanctuary.

She had thought about confronting him, but what was she going to say. She found a blond hair in her house? That sounded a bit crack pot even to her. She didn't want to confront him. She didn't want to see him. Better give him space to get over this fixation, rather than throwing a further hornet's nest in it. Whatever payoff he was getting from harassing her, she wasn't going to help. But as a couple of weeks passed without further incident, she started to let it go.

Her life was getting busy. Somehow she had accumulated a group of friends and they got up to all sorts. Then there was Matt. He was still unbelievably cute and whenever she ran into him, he would end up walking her wherever she was going. He made her laugh the entire way and sometimes, he would call her gorgeous in a roundabout way, along the lines of asking where she was going out that weekend and then commenting something like 'So that's where all the gorgeous girls go'.

A little while into their budding acquaintance, he asked her to be his date for a wedding. Apparently he needed protection from his aunt, who was hell bent on matching him up with this girl she knew. Having a date would save him a world of pain and how could Hermione refuse when he purposefully turned on the puppy dog eyes to full tilt. Hermione couldn't help but laugh as she agreed to be his protection from the evil matchmaking matrons.

She had a great time at the wedding. They laughed throughout the reception and danced when the dancing started. She loved it but there was a twinge as she realised the last time she had danced with a guy, it had been a bit more tropical and with a much more serious and sensual tone. She tried not to dwell on it, but the thoughts seemed to hang on for dear life.

When Matt dropped her off at home, he kissed her goodnight. It was a nice kiss. She felt it tingle all the way down her spine. She couldn't wipe the smile off as she said 'bye' and closed the door behind her. This was followed by days of non-stop texting.

The next weekend, he was going to take her for a drive down to Brighton to see his friend playing in a band, in his 1986 Rover that was according to him of a temperamental nature, so there were no guarantees that they would actually get there.

She waited downstairs for him when he was coming to pick her up, but he didn't arrive and it was starting to get dark outside. It wasn't like him to be late. Something must have come up, but he would have texted. She sent him a text but got nothing back. After a little

while of pacing, she got worried and apparated over to his apartment. She had never been inside, but he had pointed it out to her once.

She rung the doorbell and was surprised when he opened the door in a casual stay-at-home T-shirt and jeans.

“What’s happened?” She asked but got a confused look back. “Did you forget?”

“Forget?” He said.

“Brighton? You were taking me to Brighton.”

He went to say something, but snapped his mouth shut and gave her a further confused look.

“I think I would remember if I had agreed to take a stunning girl away for the weekend.” He said, “Are you sure you’ve come to the right apartment. Not that I am complaining. Is someone setting me up for a joke?”

“Matt?” Hermione asked, completely confused.

“You know my name.” He said. “The plot thickens.”

“Don’t you know me?” She asked, all of a sudden very suspicious.

“I am pretty sure I would have remembered you.” He said. “I must apologise, I don’t normally get drunk enough to the point where I don’t remember gorgeous girls I meet. I hope I behaved. I will apologise for any atrocious jokes I made. But since you haven’t slapped me yet, I will assume I didn’t insult your family, politics and religious beliefs all in the same night.”

He made her laugh even though she was livid. Hermione knew in her bones that this was Draco’s doing. She couldn’t even express how pissed off she was. How dare he interfere in her relationships. She could get why he’d want to break up her and Greg according to his fucked up logic. Greg was keeping her in the wizard world, but this didn’t make sense. It didn’t matter, she decided. She’d had enough. He’s pushed her and pushed her, now it was time to stop.

Hermione left Matt’s apartment and found a secluded corner where she could apparate from. She went straight to Malfoy Manor. She’d never been there before. It was an opposing structure. Not ugly. Not necessarily beautiful either. It was the aesthetics from another era. Thinking about it was distracting her.

She banged on the door and was met with a house elf.

“Where is Draco Malfoy?” She roared.

“The young Master is not here.” The house elf trembled.

Hermione felt bad for yelling at the house elf. She smiled apologetically, but she was too pissed off for it to really convey much.

“I need to speak to him urgently.” She said more gently to the elf.

“The family having dinner at Allsgave.” The elf said, but the look of uncertainty told her that the elf was probably regretting saying it. Hermione realised that the elf would probably go beat itself. Which made her even angrier.

“Thank you.” She said as nicely as she could to the elf. She apparated from the spot to Diagon Alley where this restaurant was. It was a place frequented by the wizarding elite. She’d never been there, neither had any of her friends. Her kind was discretely not welcome in such establishments.

She marched into the lavish entranceway of the restaurant, right past the Maître D, who tried to get in her way. She spotted the clump of blond hair easily in the roomful of tables.

She slammed her hands down on the table in front of Draco. It shoved some of the plates around and knocked over a glass of redwine into the lap of the girl who was obviously Draco’s date for the evening.

The girl screech as the wine hit her satiny champaign coloured dress. It was very high class slutty. It showed off the girls curves to perfection. She got a brief, unwanted flash in her mind of Draco working the dress off. A dress Hermione would never wear in public. But whatever. The kind of girls Draco associates with and what he did with them was none of her business. The girl shot Hermione a look that would probably kill if Hermione cared one little bit. Mumbling something under her breath before flouncing off to the bathroom.

“Miss Granger.” Lucius Malfoy started as if talking to an impudent child.

“Shut up!” She barked at him. Maybe some day she’ll feel joy at his surprised look.

“You do not interfere in my life Draco.” She yelled at Draco still in his seat. He wasn’t looking at her. “I’ve had enough. You don’t go anywhere near me or anyone I know.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He said, still avoiding her. He shifted in his seat to get a bit further away from her. He was obviously uncomfortable.

“Oh really.” She said and leaned in where she had him pinned in his seat. “You go anywhere me or my friends again Draco, I will tell them all about the baby.”

That got his attention. His eyes snapped to her. She had only said it loud enough for the people at the table to hear.

“You remember the baby, don’t you. The one I lost when you kicked me in the gut.”

There was a shocked gasp coming from Narcissa Malfoy. Her reaction confused Hermione somewhat. Maybe the social implications of such news was shocking to the woman, but she stared at Hermione like she was being confronted by an extraterrestrial. They didn’t believe it was true did they? Why was she looking at her like that? They knew this was all fake right? Surely Draco had told them this was all fake. Oh God, he hadn’t. What the fuck? Doesn’t matter, she told herself, his problem. One that he made, by the way.

“You wouldn’t want that to get out, do you?” She said in the steeliest voice she had ever heard herself project. “Imagine the scandal.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Try me.”

She snuck a look at Lucius Malfoy, whose lips were in a thin straight line. Even if Draco dared, Hermione was sure that Lucius would now restrain him. He had his political career to consider after all.

She had established some leverage on him. She was happy with that result, so she turned to leave. She marched towards the exit and heard Draco's chair scrape behind her.

She almost got to the exit when she felt his hand yanking her around by the elbow. They were nose to nose.

"I swear Draco, you leave me alone or I will make hell for you." She said.

He was angry. He looked like he was formulating something to say, but it didn't come out.

"Go back to the table." She said quietly and straightened an imaginary crimp in his label. She could feel the warmth of him underneath her fingers. "Finish your dinner. Go home. Fuck your girlfriend. Get on with your life. I don't care. Just leave me out of it."

She finished with a pointed look before turning and walking out the door. It wasn't a challenge, but it was a 'don't mess with me because I just told you how its going to be' look.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21

Hermione marched out of the restaurant. Adrenalin was pumping through her, enough to make her hands shake. Shake badly enough, it probably wasn't a good idea to apparate home until calms down enough to hold the wand steadily.

As she marched down the street. She could hear purposeful strides behind her. He was following her. If she had heckles, they would be standing on end right now.

A hex of some kind shot past her and hit the wall of the building ahead. She whipped around with her wand at the ready.

"We're not finished." He yelled.

"Really Draco?" she spat back. "Is there anything left to say?"

He stood about five metres away, still brandishing his wand at her.

"You don't get to just walk away." He said.

"Come on Draco. Its been a year now that you have harassed me."

The awkward silence continued. Hermione could see his anger, the sparkle of his eyes in the dark street.

"I'm out, ok." She continued. "I am out of this world. You got what you wanted. So why aren't you leaving me alone?"

He took an uncertain step forwards then stopped. After a while of silence, Hermione started to walk away, but stopped when Draco leaped to block her. Hermione tightened her grip on her wand. She wasn't angry anymore, just exhausted and weary.

"You're not making sense Draco. You have to let me go. We've played this game for a year now. Where is this going to finish? Where do you want this to finish?"

He still didn't say anything. She tried walking away again, but he stepped in her way again.

"What do you want Draco?" She yelled.

"I want you to hurt." He said quietly.

"Why?" She cried.

He was standing much closer now and she could see his face in the moonlight. His eyes seemed to be boring into hers while he tried to formulate what was on his mind.

"This is all your doing Draco. You have dragged this out, kept it alive. Why couldn't you have just let it go and move on?" She was genuinely curious now. There was obviously some unfulfilled need in that twisted mind. "Are you looking for vengeance? For what?"

“You threw me away like I was nothing!” He yelled.

Hermione was shocked at the statement and force behind it.

“No I didn’t!” She yelled back. “I was ready to fight anything for you. I would have gone to the fucking line. But what’s there to fight for if you won’t even acknowledge me.”

“You knew the situation I was in.” He said. “I couldn’t just do what I wanted. You don’t understand, I was born to a specific purpose and there are no alternatives.”

“We had this conversation a year ago. I sympathise, but I can’t live my life according to the Malfoy family traditions. It’s not my family, Draco, and I don’t... can’t live by its archaic not to mention idiotic rules.” She pleaded. “I need to live my life Draco. It was a mistake us ever getting involved. But it was what it was, now you have to let it go.”

“Do you think I haven’t tried?” He said. “I can’t.”

He stepped a little closer. Within reach. Hermione felt a panic rise as he came closer. Not from any threat, but just from the rawness.

“And how is making me hurt going to help?” She said, trying to get the conversation onto a more detached track.

“Because you can’t just walk away and leave me like this.”

“You attacked me on the street. What exactly were you planning.”

“I didn’t have a plan. I just needed to do something to get me out of the hole I was in.”

“You’re so angry with me.” She said, feeling tears well up behind her eyes.

“I can’t get you out of my head. I think about you the last thing at night and the first thing when I wake up. I thought if you left, it would fade but it hasn’t.” He said. He was standing so close now, she could smell him. His scent in her nose brought back charged memories.

“I’m sorry.” She said and took a step back. “But I can’t live in some kind of purgatory. I wish the best for you but I can’t have you shift your hell onto me. Stand by and watch while you got on with living a life, just because there is a piece that you have tied to me.”

“You would leave me to suffer, while you walk away?” He asked.

“I have to.”

She made another move to walk away, but he was practically on her now.

“How Slytherin of you.” He said, close enough so she could feel his breath on her face. She felt completely uncomfortable. Walking away from someone’s suffering wasn’t in her nature. Particularly one she was partially responsible for and one she could so easily alleviate. To her own complete and total detriment. But the call to alleviate his pain was so strong.

Hermione felt the chill of the air on her cheeks where her tears had trailed. She hadn’t realised she’d been crying.

“Come away with me.” He whispered. “We’ll go back to Cuba. Like it was. Stay there forever just you and me.”

Hermione wanted to shake her head, but he was so close now. She could feel his breath on her lips. Her mind was screaming at her to run, but somehow her legs wouldn't comply and her part of her mind was completely fixated on his lips.

The contact welled up every emotion Hermione had in her. There was pleasure, fear, lust, anger, love, spite, joy, hatred, plus some more she probably couldn't identify if she tried.

As the kiss deepened, she felt like she couldn't breathe, while at the same time feeling like she was breathing for the first time in a long time.

A flash to the side broke the spell and broke the kiss. Draco turned his head to deal with whatever it was. Hermione should have too but she could only see him. He was saying something to whatever/whoever it was.

Hermione renewed her hold on her wand and apparated away.

Hermione cried for most of the night. The encounter had shook her. No matter what happened she ended up crying.

She felt awful when she went downstairs for breakfast the next morning. Her parents were staring at her, before nodding towards the morning copy of the Daily Prophet. There was a photo of her and Draco kissing, with a large caption detailing how the younger Mr. Malfoy seems to be reconciling with his estranged wife.

"Is there something you need to tell us?" Her mother asked.

"Nope." She said and folded the paper over so the picture wasn't showing. She had to inform her parents of the false marriage assumption that Draco had perpetuated at and after her engagement party.

"Guess this mess isn't quite sorted yet." Her father said as he gave her a supportive pat on the shoulder before leaving the kitchen.

Ginny and Harry came around about five minutes later.

"What the fuck? Are you insane?" Ginny demanded. Harry positioned himself in a corner for this one.

"I believe that might be the case." Hermione responded deflatedly. "I think I might need to be committed."

"You kissed him." Ginny continued.

"It's not what it looks like."

"Really are you sure? The picture on the FRONT PAGE of the Daily Prophet was fairly descriptive."

"What were you thinking?"

"It's complicated."

"And going around kissing him will make it less so?"

"It sort of came to a head last night." Hermione tried to defend herself.

“So what, you’re together now?”

“No!” Hermione continued.

“Then what. You’re not?”

“I kind of ran away.” Hermione admitted. “After... you know. You saw.”

“Are you sure he’s not playing you?”

“I’m not sure of anything.” Hermione said sinking down on the couch.

“What the hell happened?”

“I...” She started. “Can we please not talk about it?”

“Because we know he likes to mess with you. He likes it when you’re confused and uncertain.” Harry finally piped in.

“I am starting to wonder if you are just as guilty as him in this whole thing.” Ginny said.

“How can you say that?” Hermione defended herself. Shocked at the accusation.

“Have you seen this photo?” Ginny said, turning over the Daily Prophet and studying the photo. “I doesn’t exactly look like you’re running away. I would go as far as to say that you look like you’re exactly where you want to be.”

“That’s not fair. You don’t understand.” Hermione said. “He is having trouble letting go.” She knew that trying to explain that he was in pain and it hit her like a punch in the gut would sound beyond sappy. She knew exactly the expression she would get from both of them. Part of her wanted to say it, just so she could prove herself right.

“From the looks of it,” Harry said, “many might say that’s understandable. That’s some kiss.”

“Who’s side are you on?”

“It just looks like you’re stirring things up. You were supposed to stay away from him.”

“He obliviated my date!”

Ginny and Harry gave each other a knowing look that infuriated Hermione. They were dismissing this as some kind of sick game between them. Ok, so some of it kind of rung true, but she was the innocent party here. How dare they dismiss her like this.

“You two should just get a room.” Ginny finally said.

“You suck as a friend.” Hermione said, shaking with anger.

“Get in touch when you’ve worked it all out. We’ll go do lunch or something. Love you.” Ginny said as she and Harry rushed for the door.

“How dare you leave me on my own to deal with this. I hate you!” She yelled after them.

Unbelievable, she thought, didn’t they realise how serious this was. Can’t anyone be relied upon for anything?

Chapter 22

Chapter 22

Her encounter with Draco shook her. Made worse by the fact that he'd shown her his black little heart. Offered it to her.

A part of her itched to seek him out. Another part knew it was for her own good to stay away. She just had to grit down and bare it. She knew she was being cruel, but it wasn't with malice. Although she had every right to it.

It was like a weight that had settled on her. She went about her business, went to class, came home, went out with her friends. Matt was still oblivious and Hermione hadn't bothered to correct it yet. She didn't bother as Draco was so heavily in her head at the moment. She would get around to it eventually.

It would fade though. She saw it like an addiction and she just had to buckle down until it gave up its grip on her.

She was turning away all owled messages as the moment. Two of which she knew were from him. She just couldn't deal with any of it at the moment.

A couple of weeks passed and she could at least start putting it out of her mind for chunks of time. She felt some relief as her parents went on a holiday to Australia for a month as she didn't have to act cheery all the time. They couldn't explain their draw there, but they felt a compulsion to visit. Hermione guessed it was their repressed memories from their time there during the war.

She went to a planned get together with her friends to a pizza restaurant one Friday evening. It was fun. The conversation was fuelled by a bit of alcohol and she could laugh at some of the anecdotes, usually involving some physical dealings with the opposite sex.

She had to go to the bathroom and got up from the table to seek out the ladies in the back. She followed the hall down to the toilets and felt a pair of arms around her. She didn't panic. She just knew who it was.

"Just in time, Granger." He said and brought out a box from his pocket.

Fuck, she thought to herself as she felt the pull in her body that told her she was being transported by a portkey.

She was furious when the suffocating pull lifted. She whipped around to grab hold of Draco, but he jumped out of her reach.

"Take me back." She said as she looked around and noticed that she was in the apartment, in Cuba.

"Take me back." She demanded.

"I can't. It's a portkey. I thought you knew how they work." He said derisively.

"You can't just kidnap me." She said.

"I thought we covered this already, Granger, I can pretty much do whatever I want with you. To you." He said with his well worn smirk. "Wife."

"Are we back to this now?" She asked deflated. She cursed herself as she realised that she'd left her wand in her bag that was hanging off the chair back in the restaurant.

"You can't keep me here." She stated.

"Where are you going to go?" He said.

The question threw her. Where was she going to go? She had no money. She had no wand. She had no phone, not that it would work here. She wasn't even sure she could get an international line even if she begged to use someone's phone. And even if she did, what was she going to do, beg her parents to buy her a ticket. How would she get hold of them? How were they going to send it to her? There were no owls to reach Harry. Maybe she could find an embassy. Were there embassies here? It would take weeks to organise even if they were.

Her mind was rambling through her options.

"Just take me back." She demanded.

"I can't."

"What do you mean you can't?"

"We have no way out. We can't apparate as this is an island. We can't afford to fly the muggle way and there is no wizard community here to establish a portkey."

"So how are we going to get back? How were you planning on getting back?" She demanded. "You don't have any money? Wow you must feel alien not having money in your pocket."

"We're not going back." He said and sat down on the bed.

"What?"

"We're going to stay."

"You can't be serious."

"The cupboards are stocked. We have everything we need."

"There is something seriously wrong with you, you know that?"

"I have been aware of that for close to a year now."

There was an uncomfortable silence. Draco got up and opened the balcony door. It was still daytime here and the sun was streaming into the patio below.

"They'll be playing tonight." He said looking down at the courtyard.

"You stocked the cupboards. You planned this."

"I think we need to work out our issues." He said turning back to her.

"Your issues. I don't have any issues."

"I know you want me." He said, smirking again.

"Oh please." She said with a snort. He stepped a bit closer.

"See, I remember what you liked me to do to you."

She gave him a rebellious look.

"Right over there." He said, indicating towards the bed. "Remember?"

Hermione remembered the bed, and the things they used to do on it. It was a really small bed.

He smiled and stepped away from the balcony door. Hermione was prepared to take a great leap back if he came towards her.

He didn't. Instead he took his coat off and threw it on the bed, while he went into the bathroom. As soon as he closed the door, she flew towards the coat and rifled through the pockets. She felt a surge of joy as she felt his wand. She apparated away as soon as she got it out of the pocket.

She was at the coast. One of the spots she'd painted. The sea was beautiful and Hermione sat down to watch for a while. But she was feeling anger surging through her. Damn it. He was right. She couldn't apparate over water off the island. She felt a childish compulsion to stamp her feet and as there wasn't anyone around she gave into it.

She stayed until dark, digging her toes into the sand, watching the waves. She was starting to get really tired. It was probably around 4 in the morning back in the UK. After a tirade of swearing she apparated back into the apartment. It was still pretty early in the evening. The band was just starting down in the courtyard. Draco was asleep on the bed. Still in his clothes.

The music seeped into her and warmed her with its soothing tones. It was like a lullaby and she was struggling to keep her eyes open. In the end, she had to relent and lay down on the bed next to Draco ensuring there was a distinct gap between them.

The gap had disappeared during the night and she awoke entwined in Draco's limbs the next morning. As the balcony was still open, there was a slight chill in the air. They were still on top of the blankets and Hermione groaned as she tried to extricate herself. Why didn't she get under the blankets, why didn't she foresee that she would seek out heat in the night.

"Morning Granger." He said.

"Fuck you."

"Such language." He smiled and stretched. He settled down again on his back and fell asleep.

The sun was just rising and it was shining into the room. Its warm glow made everything seem golden. It did do beautiful things to his hair and skin. Males should not be allowed to have skin like that. She watched him. His beautiful slender fingers resting on his belly, slowly moving up and down with his breath. Just touching the metal belt buckle defining the boundary between the crisp white shirt and the deep black of his pants, which graced over his hip, thighs and stomach. She remembered the beautiful muscles underneath and the little trail of hair going... She had spent so much time a year ago watching him sleep in that bed.

Granted at the time he had been nude and she thanked her lucky stars that he was dressed, because she struggled to take her eyes off him as it was.

This just would not do, she thought to herself, all he had to do was sleep and he'd seduce her.

She tore her gaze away. She was utterly famished. The cupboards really were full when she checked them. There was a lot of food there. How long was he planning on keeping her? Surely he wasn't expecting them to live here. But the amount of food in the cupboards said he was planning on staying a while.

She rested her head on the cupboard door trying to control her breathing. God, she didn't stand a chance.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23

Hermione sulked for a couple of days. She ignored him completely. She tried to keep away from him during the night, with mixed results. Somehow she would end up near him. Once she woke up when he was pulling her close. She could feel his lips on the back of her neck and was about to yell at him when his hand came up to cup her breast. As she was struggling with what to yell, he was noticeably asleep again if he even been awake to start with. She huffed to herself and tried to put some distance between them.

She would get up in the morning, hop on the scooter he had bought before they arrived and took off. He didn't argue when she left.

The island was wonderful. It was warm, colourful and inviting. Everything you wished for in the Caribbean. Music was everywhere. She loved the coastline, where the warm breezes would blow the heat of the asphalt. Draco had provided her with a choice of nice summer dresses. Shouldn't imagine what had been going through his mind when he'd gone out shopping for her.

She would return in the evening to eat. As she didn't have a cent, she couldn't eat anywhere else. Draco had food ready when she got back and they ate in silence.

The band was playing this evening, so when she was finished eating, she left Draco in the apartment and went downstairs.

The pensioners seemed to recognise her and there were lots of kisses on cheeks and holding of her face. They were saying things Hermione didn't understand, but she kept smiling and so did they.

One of the elder gentlemen asked her to dance and she accepted. It was fun and light-hearted.

After dancing for a while, she switched to another gentleman before being rushed across the dance floor, where she was delivered to Draco. The pensioners were making gestures that she should dance with him.

The light-hearted mood left pretty quickly, but she didn't want to cause a stir, so she didn't argue when he snaked his hand around her back. Everyone seemed to be watching.

"They understand we are having troubles in our marriage." He said as they danced.

"We're not actually married. You do know that don't you." She said, still not had complete confirmation that he understood that point.

"Everyone seems to accept it except for you."

"We are not married. We did not go into a church and promise ourselves to each other."

"Please, Granger. I am a wizard, I don't go into churches."

“You know what I mean. We didn’t have a ceremony. Please tell me you understand this.”

“What in all the time you’ve known me has told you that I am a complete idiot.” He said, swinging her around.

“Are you sure you want me to answer that?”

“Shut up, Granger or I’ll kiss you.”

She wanted to argue but she knew that he would absolutely fulfil his threat. They danced in silence for a while. Hermione had her hand on his shoulder. She could feel the body heat beneath the white shirt under her hand and the way the muscles moved under the skin. Things she didn’t notice when they were arguing but became undeniably clear when they stopped.

They danced in silence for an hour, because what was the alternative, go upstairs.

“Do you want to go for a walk?” He finally said and Hermione was relieved to have another option. Ideally one where the pensioners wouldn’t cheer. It was getting really late, but Hermione didn’t want to go upstairs, so she agreed.

The walk was mostly in silence. They had pretty much exhausted the topics of ‘he can’t keep her here’, but saying that, there was still so much churning away underneath the silence. All the things they never addressed that meant that a real relationship between them was absolutely impossible.

“Why can’t you accept that this is impossible?” She finally said.

“What’s impossible?” He asked, turning to her.

“Us.” She said. “You’re holding onto something that can’t be.”

Hermione could tell by his stance that he was angry. She knew him so well that she could tell his emotions by the way he held himself.

“Nothing is impossible.” He said.

Hermione snorted, which seemed to piss him off. He stared at her for a while before turning and walking back the way they came. She rolled her eyes at the whole ridiculous situation. But she had to follow him. He had the wand and as much as she loved being here, it wasn’t the kind of place you wanted to be completely defenceless at this time of night.

The patio was dark when they got back. The band had finished for the night and everyone had gone home. The apartment was dark as well. The balcony door was still open and the moonlight was enough for her to see.

Draco was standing near the balcony, looking out. Hermione knew that it was time to have a discussion about this.

“Growing up, I never thought that I didn’t fit into the wizard world.” She said. “But as I am getting older, I’ve started to see that I can’t fit into your part of it. And I’m not sure I want to.”

He turned towards her slightly, but he wasn’t looking at her.

"We've talked about his before." She said with a sigh, resigning herself to the fact that this discussion was needed again. "I can't live in the corner of your life that you'd have to keep me in. Its not fair and I don't want that."

"Everyone thinks we're married Granger." He said and finally turned. "What more do you want? You said you wouldn't accept anything less."

Hermione started to say something, but everything slipped away from her.

"You've been so focused on the fact that we aren't." He continued, "That you haven't even noticed that we are."

"You were trying to hurt me." She finally said.

"You don't know how close I've been to being disowned." He said with a tight laugh. "Its still pretty much touch and go."

"Why haven't you told them that it wasn't true?"

"Because its what you wanted." He said, leaning back against the wall.

"I.." She started. What was she going to say? It had been the reason they broke up, but that was a long time ago now and there was a lot of water under the bridge since then.

"Why are you holding on to this?" She said. "We ended and you are still holding on."

"I told you. I can't let go."

Hermione shifted her stance. She didn't know what to say.

"You've got me." He said, "And nothing I do seems to change that."

Hermione felt really uncomfortable. She didn't want to have this discussion. She looked towards the door, seeking escape from this conversation. He seemed to read her mind and pulled out his wand to lock the door. Disabling her means of escape.

"I know you can't walk away as easily as you make out." He said.

Hermione wanted to argue, but secretly she had been glad when her subsequent relationships fell apart. "I do what I have to."

"And then what?"

Hermione didn't answer. She wasn't sure what to say.

"I can't let go." He repeated, louder this time. "They won't let me have you and you won't have anything less. I bit of a dilemma."

"If I am with you." He said. "I will lose my fortune. My future."

"Then why are we here?" She asked.

"What if I can't ever get over you? I either suppress those feelings and live a life without them, or I choose you and live in poverty, without my family and its connections. My fortune or my heart. It seems I can't have both. My family is hoping for a discreet little divorce, so all can go back as it should be. Then we can all forget about this little indiscretion, as they call it.

But then I would end up having to watch you eventually marry someone else and get on with a life without me. Placing me potentially forever in a cold, dark place I dread.”

“Not a decision I envy you.” Hermione finally said.

“Actually.” He said, facing back towards the outside. “It’s a decision, you are going to have to make for me.”

“You can’t ask me to do that.” She said, shocked. “That is completely unfair.”

“Nothing about this is fair.” He said.

“You can’t ask me to make such a decision.”

“Yes I can.” He said facing back towards her. “My decision is made. Now you have to decide my fate.”

Hermione’s desire to escape was palpable. Her mouth had gone completely dry and her distress only heightened as he walked to stand in front of her.

“You said you were ready to fight for me.” He said, so close she could feel the heat from his body. “Will you fight for me now?”

She couldn’t quite stop the tears from flowing down her cheeks. Was it true what she had said? Was she really prepared to fight for him? If so, was it still true? Their relationship had been easy when it wasn’t based on anything real, but now that he was asking for a full commitment, it was much scarier. She had been the one who broke it off because the commitment was not full and complete.

Bastard. No ‘I’ll be fine’ whatever you decide. No, it was, I’ll suffer if you don’t. Which may well be true, but what right did he have to be truthful in a situation like this.

So Hermione, this is it. Will you take this man, who is incidentally moving much closer to kissing you, to have and to hold. This man who is funny and sexy, strong and passionate, as well as occasionally unstable and potentially hereditarily mad. In abject poverty, and maybe without any means to ever get off this island.

“Will you?” He whispered, his lips almost touching hers.

“You’re clouding my judgement.” She said clearing her throat, trying to distract herself from the lips that were beckoning.

“Good. I need an answer.” He said.

Hermione tried to squirm, but the slightest touch of his lips made her say, “Yes.”

The kiss was a complete relenting. It was slow and deep, and with much more meaning than she had ever experienced before. She could even taste her own tears within it. But much more importantly, she could taste him. Anyway she cut it, it tasted like home.

He broke the kiss and said, “I’ll have nothing.”

“Don’t really care.” She said.

“So we’re clear.” He smiled and kissed her again. The kiss turned heated and before she knew it, they were on the bed. Desperately grabbing with getting rid of clothes that were in

the way. A year of denial dissipating as he sunk into her. It took nothing at all. Three strokes and it turned her completely inside out. It really was the fastest sex she had ever had, but all she needed was him inside her. How in the world did she manage to live without this for a year?

After their breathing returned, Draco explored every inch of her with his hands, tongue and lips. It only took of few minutes of him ministrations before she needed him inside her again. It was much slower this time, savoured. He kissed her as she came and seemed to stop just to feel the contractions. But the heat built again as he sought his own release with a more forceful pace.

That sated feeling just wouldn't stick, but neither of them were complaining.

From then on, they weren't really physically apart. They were either in bed, dancing or snuggled up nice and close on the scooter riding around the island.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24

Of course Draco lied about not having a way off the island. He had a portkey that activated once a month. It still took them three months to decide to go home.

Hermione was very nervous about heading back home. Their relationship worked perfectly when they were away from everyone and everything. In fact, it was perfect. But last time they went back, it fell apart when they were faced with the real world. Hermione feared everything. Most of all, she feared that Draco would resent her for losing his family and his fortune. She would go through period when she knew in her bones that this would not last. It had too much against it.

But Draco would always talk her out of her fears. And if talking didn't do it, he would use other means to refocus her on what was important.

Draco had some money put aside, which would keep them going for a little while. Then they had to live on their own means. This scared Hermione the most. It wasn't a problem for her, she could live on a shoe string, but Draco was used to the best of everything and she wasn't sure he could compromise.

Her parents were pretty accepting of the relationship, as was Harry and Ginny to Hermione's infinite surprise. Ron was not so accepting. Neither were Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy. Draco was disowned as soon as they moved in together in a small flat near Diagon Alley. Many of Draco's friends were less than accepting as well.

The flat was tiny, but Draco didn't complain. Hermione was waiting for it, but he never mentioned anything.

He got a job at Gringotts pretty promptly, which secured an income. Hermione went back to working in Fred's joke shop until she could sit her NEWTS. Once that was done, she got a good entry level position in the Department of Magical Enforcement doing administration. Harry helped her secure the position and she was grateful even though she disapproved of him using his powers of persuasion as he called it.

With both of them working, their income was soon sufficient to afford a nice little cottage in Godric's Hollow. They had a core group of friends which included Harry, Ginny, Neville, Fred, Luna, Blaise Zabini, Theo Nott, and Pansy Parkinson. They were a bit uneasy around each other at first, but old school lines gave way to merciless teasing, to finally acceptance of each other's unique characters and life view points. Ron and Lavender immersed themselves in the group over time. Lavender was there through her relationship with Ron, because she did a fantastic job annoying everyone.

Hermione's fears started to settle a bit as time went on. She was sure that Draco missed his family, but he didn't seem to stress about it too much. In fact, he seemed very laid back about it.

Neither was he surprised when Narcissa's conviction to his disownment lasted to around five seconds after the first grandchild was born. Lucius stood by his convictions longer. He suffered through a few lonely Christmases before his resolve seemed to weaver some. The second child, a son, was his ultimate undoing.

Draco was never un-disowned, but innocent children deserved to be regarded without the sins of their father, or something along those lines.

Lucius' disownment of his son ended up killing his ambitions for becoming Minister, which Hermione thought of as a small mercy they had bestowed on the world.

Ultimately, Draco did well in his reduced circumstances. Hermione guessed there was a certain kind of pride in being able to provide for your own family by your own means.

They kept the little apartment in Cuba and retreated there whenever they wanted to get away from it all. They got the chance fairly often and Lucius and Narcissa dragged the children all over Europe to ensure that their education in appropriate wizard ways was not neglected. Over the years the Cuban apartment became a little larger and a little more renovated. Hermione wouldn't go as far as to install marble in the bathroom as Draco had planned, but she would agree to a nice slate.

The End